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TRADITIONAL FIDDLING IN STRATHSPEY:  
THE UNSCHOOLED SCOTS FIDDLER AND HIS STYLE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is based on the results of field-research carried out in the upper Spey Valley, with supplementary recordings and other necessary information from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University. It sets out to describe the style and attitudes of fiddlers from that area and to relate them to the Scottish fiddle tradition as a whole.

A broad distinction is drawn between two categories of Scottish fiddler - the 'schooled' and 'unschooled' - based on criteria of musical education, and the study attempts, by taking one particular fiddler as a central figure in the discussion, to describe and analyse aspects of style and attitude in the playing of the 'unschooled' fiddler in Strathspey.

A 'sound portrait' of this fiddler, Mr. John Grant of Tulloch, is provided on an accompanying tape. This consists of edited conversations, with musical examples, made on different occasions at his home, and arranged to correspond to the structure of the dissertation, providing both commentary on and illustration of the main text. Recordings of all the musical examples discussed are provided on track 2 of the tape.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. In Part I, after an introduction setting out the aims of the study and giving a brief geographical and social description of the area, Chapter

1 discusses the learning process among Strathspey fiddlers and sets out the basic criteria for the division of the 'schooled' and 'unschooled' categories. Chapter 2 ('The Fiddler's World') attempts to define the Scottish fiddle tradition as a whole and the position of the unschooled fiddler within it. It argues that previous studies have presented too simplistic a picture and have tended to concentrate on the 'schooled' fiddler as representative of the whole; it also discusses various social situations in which fiddlers participate.

Part II examines the style of unschooled fiddlers under two main headings: 'Harmony' and 'Rhythm'. After an introduction in which the concept of style in fiddle-playing is defined, Chapter 3 examines the relationship between harmony and melody and discusses the 'harmonic dimension' of melodic variants played by informants in Strathspey. The use of 'drone' or open-fifth 'chording' effects by some players is analysed, and the idea of a harmonic 'deep-structure' discussed. Chapter 4 examines the rhythmic structure of the strathspey and demonstrates that it is conceptually a fluid rhythmic style rather than a clearly-defined set of rhythmic formulæ. The nature of rhythmic structure in strathspey-playing is shown, in Chapter 5, to be to a considerable extent a function of bowing-style, and individual bowing styles are here examined in detail. Comments on bowing from both 'schooled' and 'unschooled' fiddlers are quoted and discussed, and a contrast in attitudes clearly shown. The evidence shows that bowing styles, always to some extent unique to the individual player, are much less subject to traditional



conventions among 'unschooled' than among 'schooled' players. Chapter 6 consists of an examination of the concept of 'lilt' or 'irregular-pulse rhythmic style' in strathspey playing - especially that of John Grant; time-signal transcriptions are used to describe this aspect of style in detail and the possible 'norms' of the style are discussed.

Appendices include: a complete transcript of the 'sound-portrait' tape; transcriptions of all music examples not included within the text; brief biographical notes on the informants; a list of the relevant recorded tapes in the sound-archive of the School of Scottish Studies, and a full bibliography.

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## Introduction

### AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In Scotland today, 'traditional dance musio' is enjoying the peak of a renaissance which began in the 1920's, after a period during which it had seemed to many people to be suffering a decline in the wake of dwindling interest in the dance forms themselves. But while traditional dance music and dance forms are now a securely established part of Scottish culture, significant changes in the way the music is used mean that the tradition is in many respects very different from that of the eighteenth century, often referred to as its 'golden age'.

The change in use of Scots dance music has involved a change in the instruments used to play it. Thus, while the fiddle was originally the instrument most used (along with the bagpipe) for performance of music for dancing, its place has been taken by the piano-accordion (or, more properly, the accordion-based country dance band). At the same time, the fiddle is now used to play dance music primarily for listening.<sup>1</sup> It could, I think, be fairly said that traditional dance music now has a considerably larger 'listening' than 'dancing' audience.

The reasons for this development towards dance music as listening music are complex, and they will be discussed later, in Chapter Two. It is enough to say here that acknowledgement of the diversity of use of traditional dance music is important to an understanding of the Scots fiddle tradition as a whole; a lack of

recognition of this complexity by recent writers on the tradition has prompted this study,

### Aims of the Study

This study of traditional fiddling in Strathspey seeks to do two things: firstly, it aims to provide a more complete and objective explanation of the present-day fiddle tradition of Scotland than has been attempted by the few writers who have hitherto discussed the subject. Secondly, it concentrates on a particular, fairly compact geographical area closely associated in the past with the fiddle tradition -- Strathspey -- and examines fiddlers and fiddle playing there from various angles, i.e. learning processes, socio-musical activity and playing style. By taking one fiddler, John Grant of Tulloch, as a central informant, and by making comparisons with other informants in the area and outside it; I hope to demonstrate the attitudes and playing style of a particular category of musician -- the unschooled fiddler -- and to explain his relationship to the Scottish fiddle tradition as a whole.

### The Choice of Study Area

The North East of Scotland has historically been second only to Perthshire as a centre of traditional fiddle-playing, and the Spey Valley is itself intimately bound up with the early development of that tradition. It is commonly supposed to be the birthplace of the Strathspey dance and, whether or not that is the case, the dance at

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<sup>1</sup>This is, of course, a generalisation, since country dance bands play also to a 'listening' audience (on record and radio) and a small number of fiddlers play in country dance bands.

least owes its name to the fact that it was particularly popular in the area in the seventeenth century. One tradition has it that the Browns of Kincardine (in the parish of Abernethy) actually invented the dance,<sup>2</sup> but its 'invention' by an individual seems unlikely. Certainly many notable fiddlers and composers of fiddle music have come from the area.

Because of these historical associations and the fact that the central stretch of the valley was geographically fairly self-contained, Strathspey seemed a good area in which to examine rural fiddle traditions and the ways in which country fiddlers play and conceive their music. In common with the rest of rural Scotland the proportion of traditional fiddlers now living in the Spey Valley is much smaller than it was at the turn of the century; distribution is scattered; and there are no longer communities of fiddlers centred round a single village as there are, for example, in Ireland. A preliminary field trip in the Dee Valley, another area with a long fiddle tradition, confirmed this view.

Despite its relatively compact physical setting, Strathspey posed some awkward problems of field research. The wide distribution of fiddlers necessitated a good deal of travelling in an area where transport is not good, so that it was not possible to interview and record every informant to the same degree of detail. However, I felt that eleven fiddlers of varying standard and background was a sufficient number for general purposes of comparison; and since I

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<sup>2</sup>W. Forsyth, In the Shadow of Cairngorm: Chronicles of the Parishes of Abernethy and Kincardine (Inverness: The Northern Counties Publishing Co., 1900), p. 275.

wanted, in any case, to concentrate especially on one informant, I found that I had enough material of a sufficiently homogeneous nature for analysis.

### The Unschooled Fiddler

As I have said, Scots fiddle music is now more often played for listening to than for dancing. At the beginning of my preparation for this study I naturally listened to recordings of fiddlers whom I knew to be considered as leading exponents of the tradition; some of these had been given special mention in recent books on traditional music in Scotland. These fiddlers are well known through their participation in the most important categories of socio-musical activity open to the fiddler today -- competitive festivals, public concerts and through radio broadcasts and gramophone records. Some of them attached great importance to musical ancestry, to having inherited the traditional style of some famous fiddler of the past, like Niel Gow or Scott Skinner, through a direct line of teaching. Taped interviews and meetings with some of them confirmed that they had a very definite view of the tradition and their part in it. They displayed, on the whole, a keen interest in the finer points of traditional technique, bowing technique especially (this is discussed fully in Chapter Five). And in the literary aspect of the repertoire they often showed a good knowledge of many of the older tune collections. These fiddlers normally produced a smooth, 'cultured', violinistic tone, with vibrato in slower music, and held the fiddle in the normal violinist's position. Indeed, they often preferred the term 'violin' to 'fiddle'. Most of them had learned fiddle style through oral tradition, but all of them had

also had tuition in 'classical' violin technique, at some point; and they felt that this, rather than destroying the traditional elements of their style, had provided a better technique with which to present it.

These fiddlers are of mixed social background -- some working-class, some lower-middle class, and many, though by no means all, are town dwellers. They represent, in a sense, the 'establishment' of the Scots fiddling world, i.e. winning prizes at competitions, judging and organising competitions. Many, of course, never achieve notable success, but are content merely to enter competitions and play in fiddle bands.

In Strathspey, however, I found that most fiddlers were rather different in attitude and style. Several had in their youth played regularly for dancing and in fiddle bands, and some had appeared with success in local, small-scale competitions. But essentially they were 'dance' players, and the passing of regular dances for which fiddlers were needed had left them without the kind of social occasion in which they felt most at home. All of them had learned 'by ear' (to use their own expression) through oral tradition; some could not read music, and the rest rather inadequately. Most came from families with a long musical tradition and were conscious that their home area, Strathspey, had a tradition of its own. They shared many basic characteristics of traditional technique with the first category of fiddlers, but lacked their articulation and interest in technique itself. Many of them are old and technically past their best, but in general the sound they produced was quite different from that of the other fiddlers -- a harder, unviolinistic sound (with a preference

for steel strings and a slightly flatter bridge) no vibrato and frequent use, in some cases, of ringing open fifths. They played only in the first position and usually held the fiddle in a more 'traditional' position, with the body held well below the chin, the neck in the cup of the left hand, and the left elbow low, sometimes resting on the knee. Their repertoire was generally more restricted than that of the other fiddlers and contained few 'listening' tunes' such as slow airs and slow strathspeys. Finally, they belonged to the lower socio-economic categories of this rural area.

In discussions with certain of the first group of fiddlers I found that they tended to be dismissive of the second group, regarding their playing as 'rough' and generally unacceptable as 'good' traditional fiddling. On the other hand, the second group admired the first greatly, and generally wished that they could play like them. It seemed that each of these two groups held different views of the meaning and the value of traditional fiddle music, that the norms and variables of style were for them not entirely the same.

I felt it necessary, then, to find a way of describing each of these categories that would express, as much as a generalisation would allow, a basis for these differences of style and attitude. In fact, the most constant factor underlying the contradictions would seem to be to do with the nature of their musical education, itself a part of a much wider enculturative process. For the purpose of this study, therefore, I have proposed two broadly defined categories in which to group fiddlers -- 'schooled' and 'unschooled'.<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup>This categorization represents only one approach. A more sociological approach, relating fiddle style, structure and 'meaning'



categories will be further elucidated in Chapter One where I shall discuss fiddle learning processes in Strathspey more fully.

One informant in particular, John Grant of Tulloch, will be discussed in detail as the core of this study. I take him to be typical, in as much as it is possible for a musician to be typical, of the unschooled fiddler in Strathspey. In discussion of social and educational background, of style and repertoire, and of the unschooled fiddlers' 'world-view' he will provide a point of reference for detailed analysis and comparison.

### Thesis Structure -- the Sound Evidence

The tape which accompanies this dissertation is to be regarded as an integral part of it. Track A contains a 'sound portrait' of John Grant and consists of edited conversations recorded on different occasions at his home. The sound portrait corresponds in structure to the text of the dissertation, covering, in Part I, learning processes and "The Fiddler's World", and in Part II, "Style". It is intended to act both as a commentary on and an illustration of the main text; a complete transcription of the sound portrait is provided in Appendix I.

Track B of the tape provides sound recordings of all the performances from Strathspey discussed in the text, as well as of certain other performances cited for comparative purposes. References to individual tapes from the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies give the catalogue number with its prefix SA or SM (e.g. SA 1973/105).

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to the identification of categories of socio-musical behaviour -- social genres -- is represented by Jos Koning's study of traditional

This dissertation is based on the results of a total of six weeks' field-research supplemented by recordings and other documentary information from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University. The field-work was carried out during the winter of 1973-74 and early summer, 1974. Recordings of John Grant were made on three separate visits of varying lengths, but much of the conversation presented in the 'sound portrait' was recorded during a period of a week in which I lived in his house. I must acknowledge his warm hospitality and friendship, as well as the kindness and patience of all my informants in Strathspey.

#### THE STUDY AREA --

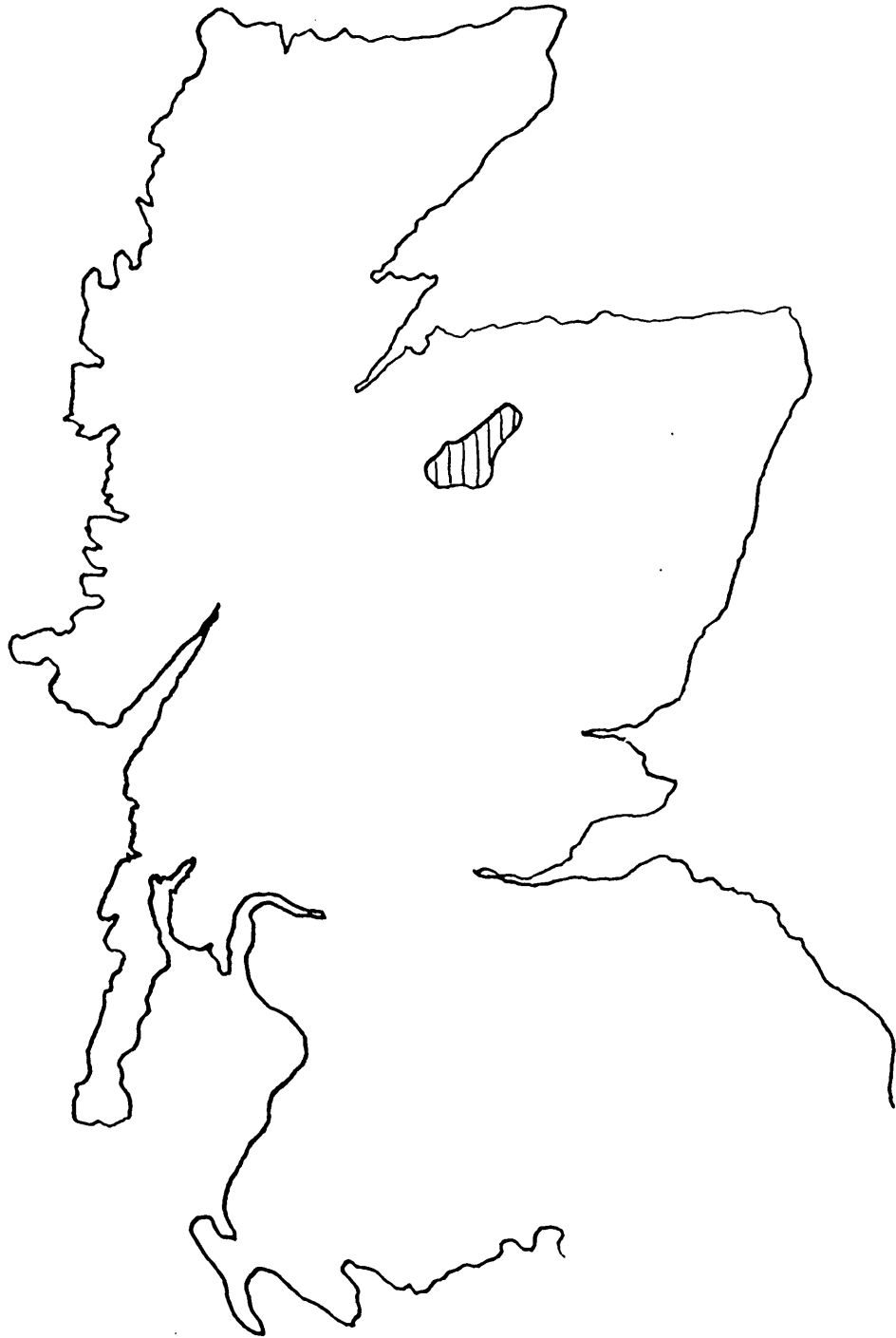
##### GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

#### Strathspey -- Physical Setting

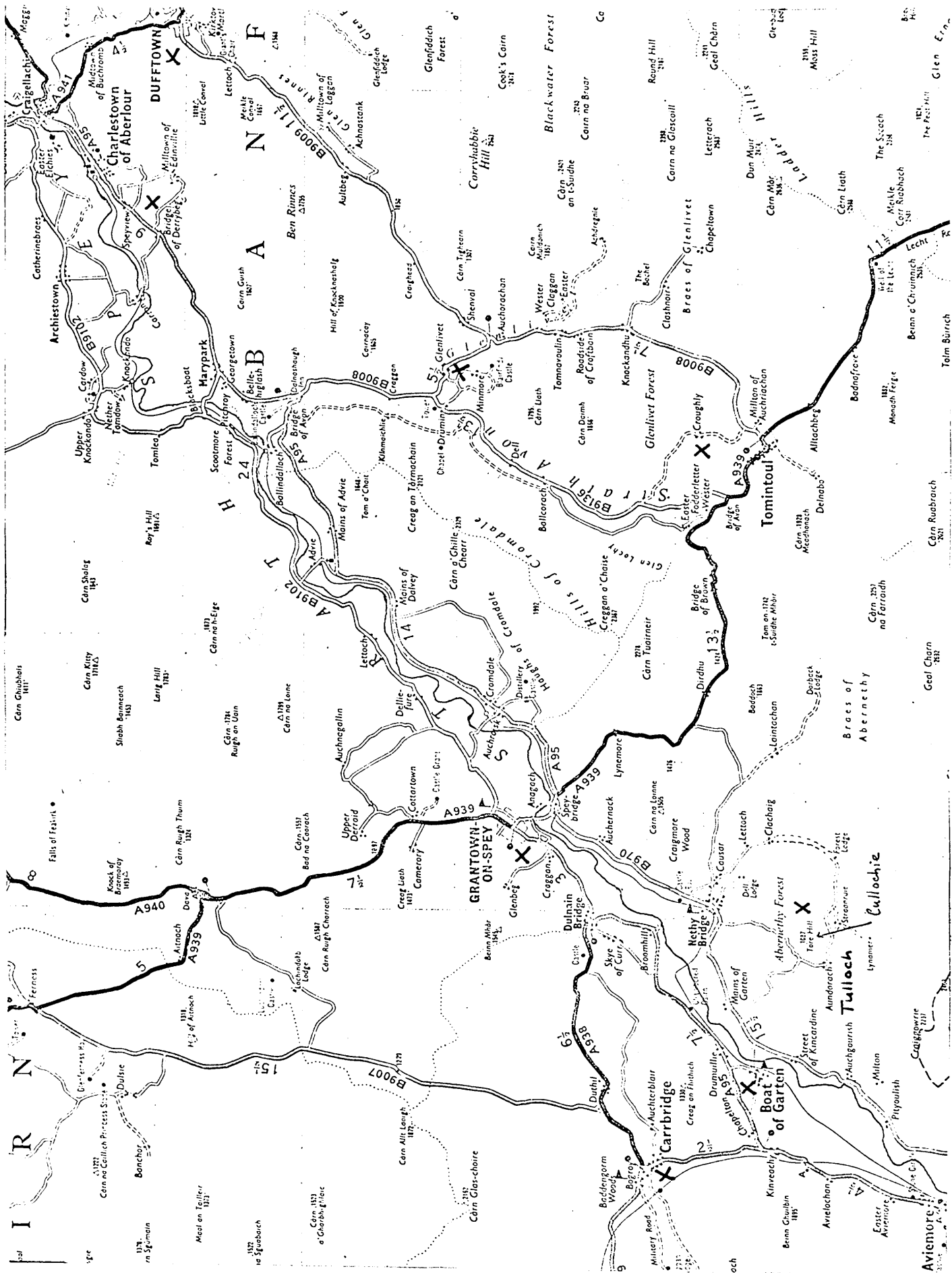
The area under study comprises the central and upper part of the Spey Valley (variously known as Speyside and Strathspey) from Boat of Garten at the southern end to Dufftown in the north. It does not include the extreme upper (southern) part of the valley, which includes the centres of Aviemore, Newtonmore and Kingussie or the lower part where the river approaches the sea. In addition to the valley itself, the related tributary valleys of Strathavon (Glenlivet and Tomintoul) and Glen Fiddich (Dufftown) are included.

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musicians in an Irish village -- J. Koning, "Irish Traditional Dance Music," (unpublished Doktoraal Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1976). However, since many of these social genres no longer operate in Strathspey, such an approach would be hampered by lack of contemporary evidence needed for detailed observation.



Map 1. Study Area -- Strathspey.



Map 2. Strathspey. X denotes main informants

This part of the valley covers three counties from south to north -- Inverness-shire, Morayshire and Banff. The valley enters the Cairngorm mountain range in the south and the hills which bound it become gradually lower north of Grantown so that the area of Aberlour and surrounding hamlets is rolling upland. The Strathavon valley is mostly high above sea level, rising to just under 2000 feet, and the village of Tomintoul, the highest village in Scotland, is frequently isolated by heavy snowfalls in winter. There is large-scale afforestation, especially in the southern half of the valley, and while a sizeable proportion of land in the northern half is given over to upland farming (an average maximum of 40-50 acres per farm) a greater proportion is grouse moor.

Population is scattered and settlement is concentrated at either end of the study area -- Dufftown (population 1468) and Aberlour (pop. 764) with associated hamlets in the north, and Grantown (pop. 1601<sup>4</sup>) with its associated villages of Carrbridge (pop. 233), Boat of Garten (pop. 480) and Nethy Bridge in the south. The extreme ends of the area do not have much social contact, considering their proximity to the thriving population centre of Elgin to the north, and this is confirmed in a recent report on the northern part (excluding the area south of Grantown) produced by Aberdeen University:<sup>4</sup>

In terms of location relative to large centres of population and to main lines of communication, the area can for the most part, if not in its entirety, be regarded as relatively remote and isolated.

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<sup>4</sup>Aberdeen University (Department of Geography), Speyside Study: A Report to the N.E. Scotland Development Authority (Aberdeen, 1973), p. 3.

Population and Employment -- Grantown and the South

Grantown (founded as a 'planned village' in 1776, by the family of Grant, Earls of Seafield) found favour in Victorian times as a holiday resort of the kind that middle-class families found congenial for health reasons, and it has remained an important tourist centre for the Spey Valley with a large number of hotels and guest houses, many of which close in the winter months. The villages of Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge and, to a lesser extent, Boat of Garten, also depend heavily on tourist trade. But Aviemore, to the south, which fifteen years ago was a similar small-scale holiday centre, has, in the last ten years, been developed into one of the major tourist centres in Scotland. Its proximity to the Cairngorm range makes it ideal as a ski and winter sports centre. Huge commercial development, including hotels, restaurants and shops with ancillary entertainment and conference facilities, is concentrated there; and some of the resultant tourist-trade, which is naturally extended through the winter, has spilled over into the other villages and as far afield as Grantown.

Increased opportunities for employment for local people have allowed many young people to stay in an area where formerly job prospects were extremely poor, but much of the enormous demand for staff to service the Aviemore developments can only be satisfied by importation of labour from the cities, so that Aviemore itself now has a large 'incomer' population. Population figures in the area had previously been falling, a downward spiral that had begun in the 1880's. Recent figures show that the area north of Aviemore continues to show this trend while Aviemore itself showed a 31 per cent

increase between 1950 and 1966.<sup>5</sup> Agriculture and forestry is the major source of employment after the 'Commercial and Professional' category (which is mainly involved in tourism), but the proportion of workers in the former is only 23 per cent compared with 58 per cent in the latter.

The Earl of Seafield owns most of the land in Strathspey, and most of the small hill farmers in the upper part of the valley are his tenants. But more and more of these crofts and hill-farms are either empty or used only for winter sheep-grazing.

Population and Employment -- Dufftown, Aberlour and Strathavon

The north and central part of the area has the same problems of falling population -- a decline of 15,860 in 1901 to 8800 in 1971 -- and poor transport facilities. Hill farms cultivate oats, barley and potatoes, particularly on the Aberlour stretch of the river. Whiskey distilling is, however, by far the most important industry in this part of the valley. Speyside is one of the major Scottish centres of distilling, and has been since its beginnings in the early nineteenth century. Dufftown, especially, has a large number of distilleries, and is overwhelmingly dependant on them as a source of employment. Many others are situated along the valley. Strathavon, too, has several distilleries, including that at Glenlivet. Whiskey distilling itself is highly mechanised and employs fewer men than many other industries; ancillary trades, such as coopering, employ a significant proportion of the work

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<sup>5</sup>Edinburgh University (Department of Geography), The Impact of

force. Small communities live round the distilleries, the houses providing rent-free accomodation for the staff. Strathavon is in a slightly curious position, being halfway between Dufftown and Grantown. The village of Tomintoul and the other scattered farm and distillery settlements of the valley are in fact fairly self-sufficient, being remote even within the whole Strathspey area. While Tomintoul is nearer Grantown and more dependant on Grantown for shopping and entertainment facilities, Glenlivet at the other end of the valley has more of an orientation towards Dufftown.

### Community Life

As in most rural areas in Northern Scotland, population decline has seriously affected the quality of community life in Strathspey. Social activities in general are undersupported and musical activities (such as village-hall dances) have become less and less frequent. Village halls themselves have fallen into disrepair in many hamlets. For example, the village hall in Knockando where one of my informants once heard Scott Skinner play is now closed; and as the Aberdeen report quoted above says: "By travelling into the larger settlements . . . such as Elgin, Keith and Aviemore, the lack of local facilities can be offset, although this in turn may lead to their further deterioration".<sup>6</sup> This problem of dependance on a neighbouring population centre for recreational and social

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Tourist Development in Upper Speyside: A Report (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>Aberdeen University, op. cit., p. 37.



activity is particularly marked in the southern part of the study area where most young people and many older people rely heavily on the Aviemore Centre for entertainment. While live musical entertainment is also provided in some hotels in Grantown, Carrbridge and Nethy Bridge, this is aimed primarily at attracting tourist trade and tends to be imported from the cities. Though local village dances do occur occasionally in these smaller centres, they too are promoted with visitors in mind and the musicians are often imported. As far as fiddlers and other traditional musicians are concerned, very few participatory activities are left to them, so that music-making is for them mainly a home recreation. The high average age of fiddlers in Strathspey also tends to lead to isolation and an unwillingness (and sometimes inability) to play in pubs (for example) where opportunities might arise. This also contributes in part to their isolation from each other, though an equally important cause is the decline of social activities involving several fiddlers, like the fiddle band.

Culturally, the two halves of the area are noticeably different in certain respects. The Grantown and southern part of the valley in the counties of Moray and Inverness are predominantly 'Highland' in tradition and orientation, while Strathavon and the Dufftown-Aberlour area are decidedly 'North-East' in tradition and culturally more closely related to the 'Lowland' Banffshire and Aberdeenshire. Their accent and dialect is related to the 'Doric' of Aberdeenshire -- and one notices the difference in speech quite suddenly between Cromdale and Marypark, a distance of less than ten miles. The Grantown area was, in contrast, largely Gaelic-speaking until the end of the nineteenth century -- almost the entire population of the parish of Abernethy

being registered as Gaelic speakers in the census of 1891.<sup>7</sup> And though Gaelic is now spoken in the area by a mere handful of old people, the accent and dialect of the people show a distinct Gaelic origin.

The line of Clan Grant, the Lairds of Castle Grant (just outside Grantown), Earls of Seafield and owners of most of the land in Strathspey and many other parts of Scotland, dates from medieval times. The southern part of the study area, especially, shows the extent of their influence over the economy of the area -- they are the biggest employer, in forestry and agriculture, after the newly expanded tourist industry of Aviemore. Indeed, a very large number of the tenants of their land are their kinsmen; Grant is easily the commonest surname in the area.

### Tulloch

Situated in the Abernethy Forest, in the parish of Abernethy between Nethy Bridge and Boat of Garten, Tulloch consists of a cluster of some seventeen crofts and small hill farms round the base of a hill, Tore Hill, which rises to a maximum of 1087 feet. The settlement is a very old one, certainly five centuries old and probably considerably older. It was at one time the seat of one of the smaller septs of the Grant Clan (an offshoot of the Grants of Ballindalloch<sup>8</sup>) and it has one of the strongest legends relating to the composition of the "Reel o Tulloch," one version of which (different

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<sup>7</sup>F.H. Groome, ed., Ordnance Gazeteer of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1901).

<sup>8</sup>J.Alan Rennie, Romantic Strathspey (London: Robert Hale, 1956).

from that of John Grant) involves "Ishbel dubh" -- Ishbel Grant, daughter of Allan Grant who lived in Tulloch in the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Tulloch was very much a village community until the First World War, with a school and a community hall as well as a church nearby (Parish Church of Kincardine). In 1891 Tulloch School contained 84 pupils; Gaelic was still widely spoken until the First World War (a few native Gaelic speakers who are left are among the oldest inhabitants), and Gaelic services with precentor and unaccompanied psalm-singing were still given in the church in John Grant's childhood. However, depopulation had already begun by the beginning of the century, and it accelerated sharply during the economic depression between the wars.

The crofts consist of small, rather unproductive tracts of land surrounded by dense forest and much of it is suitable only for sheep grazing in winter. Many of the crofts are now empty or inhabited by old, retired people. Seafield Estates, who own the land, have done little to improve croft facilities, and some of the houses still lack basic necessities like electricity and running water.

Tulloch is, then, no longer a living community; the school was closed many years ago and there is no longer any social life to speak of. John Grant lives in the croft of Cullochie of Rymore on the south-west slopes of Tore Hill. He stopped cultivating the rather poor-quality acre or so of land (which formerly grew oats and barley) in the 1950's, and now lives on his pension and a small

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<sup>9</sup>W. Forsyth, op. cit.

income from another farmer who grazes his sheep on the croft during the winter.

Cullochie has been in John Grant's family at least since the middle of the nineteenth century and perhaps earlier, though the Ledger of Rental of Abernethy of 1817 (see Forsyth, Ibid., App. V) gives Fraser as the name of the tenant of that time. Mr. Grant now lives alone in the croft (his mother died about ten years ago) and passes the time by playing his fiddle and watching television at the house of a neighbour. In the 'lambing' season his lifetime's experience in animal husbandry is in demand in neighbouring crofts. His cottage, of the simple two-roomed 'but-and-ben' type, can have changed very little since the last century (except for the thatched roof which has been replaced by corrugated iron). It is still without gas and electricity, and water has to be brought in buckets from a nearby spring. John Grant is the last fiddler in Tulloch.

#### Distribution of Fiddlers in Strathspey

This study is based on information gathered from most of the fiddlers living in a large part of the Spey Valley along with data gathered from some others who were interested in the subject, though not themselves players. It was not possible, for various reasons, to visit and interview a few other fiddlers known to me by name, but I am satisfied that my informants form the majority and are, on the whole, 'typical' (if such a word can be used at all) of fiddlers in Strathspey.

As I have said, population in this area is scattered; accordingly, fiddlers, too, are scattered. Considering the geographical size of the study area, the number of traditional fiddlers now in Strathspey, is quite small -- though it should be remembered that the population of the area is itself small. Certainly, as in other parts of Northern Scotland, traditional fiddlers are much rarer in rural areas than they were fifty or sixty years ago. Indeed, one informant in Archiestown near Aberlour, was able to recall the names of at least ten fiddlers who lived within ten miles of his village in the 1920's.

As can be seen from Map Two, my informants are distributed widely over the whole area. There is nothing approaching a 'community' of fiddlers, though all of the Grantown area informants are former members of such a 'community', centred on the Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society between the wars; three of these live in one village, Carrbridge. In the main, the informants belong to the lower socio-economic groups of the area, and the main categories of employment (except for forestry) are represented in fairly accurate proportion; they include three small farmers, two distillery workers, one farm labourer, four from 'service' trades (post office, taxi-driver, electrician, etc.) and one hotelier.

## PART I

## Chapter I

## THE LEARNING PROCESS

'Och, ye wouldna have to play it long -- if ye  
 got a good ear, ye'll pick up the tune like anything.'  
 ' . . . I got music from every side ye see. . . '

(John Grant, App. I, p.179)

Investigating the enculturative, the learning process in music is always difficult. This is particularly true in a culture where musical skills are orally transmitted in an informal context, and rather privately -- as it were, at the heart of family life. In any case, many of the formative influences on a child, in the non-musical as well as the musical sense, are at a subconscious level. They are dimly remembered in later life (if at all), and one is forced to base observations partly on speculation, informed though it may be.

These difficulties are compounded, in the present study, by an absence of children -- indeed, of young people -- among my informants in Strathspey. Hardly any of the evidence results from fiddle-learning processes observed in action. Rather, my concern is to build up a picture of the ways in which my informants became fiddlers, from their own accounts; so that I can discuss the musical and social influences that have created Speyside fiddlers in the last fifty years, and amplify my view of them as representative of a distinct category of traditional musician.

The learning process is, of course, something that happens in an enormous variety of ways -- through many channels, both 'casual'

and 'formal', conscious and unconscious. Psychologists have not so far been very helpful in illuminating the nature of musicianship and the ways in which it is acquired, perhaps because of their tendency to ignore the cultural implications of the problem<sup>10</sup> -- and in this chapter I shall concentrate on cultural aspects. Reliance on informants' memories of their early efforts to play, and of music heard and played in youth, necessitates an awareness on the part of the field worker of a certain chronological elasticity in reminiscences of the distant past, especially with old people. One has to be wary, therefore, of such statements as 'I learned that tune in a night or two', when further questioning may reveal two nights expanding into a fortnight.

#### 'Schooled' and 'Unschooled' -- Criteria

In the Introduction, I have described some characteristics of style and attitude of two kinds of traditional fiddlers, and here I wish to set out some of the music-educational criteria which I feel are basic to the distinction.

The second category, represented by John Grant and most of the Strathspey fiddlers, is sometimes described as 'self-taught' -- indeed, the fiddlers themselves might use this term. But one runs into a semantic problem here. Is anyone really 'self-taught'? Alan Merriam writes that 'since culture is learned behaviour, learning must take place';<sup>11</sup> human behaviour patterns of innumerable

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<sup>10</sup>According to Blacking, "If studies in the psychology of music and tests of musicality have failed to reach agreement on the nature of musicality, it is probably because they have been almost exclusively ethnocentric". J. Blacking, How Musical is Man? (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1973), p. 5.

kinds cannot avoid being learned by anyone within his own culture. This naturally applies to part, at least, of the learning of music as an aspect of human behaviour -- and teaching cannot be, as it were, self-inflicted in a way separate from the influence of a vast variety of educative mechanisms inherent in culture itself. It might be said that teaching oneself involves merely the practice of the example imitated, or otherwise learned, from others.

An alternative term used by fiddlers for a player with no formal training or ability to read printed music is 'ear player' ( and this is, in fact, how John Grant describes himself). However, some of my informants, and most formally trained fiddlers would claim that part, at least, of their repertoire was learned 'by ear' despite a degree of musical literacy; so that the ambiguity of this term outweighs the attractiveness of its use in the terminology of fiddlers themselves.

Merriam, quoting Herskovits, gives the definition of 'schooling' as "those processes of teaching and learning carried on at specific times, in particular places outside the home, for definite periods, by persons especially prepared or trained for the task."<sup>12</sup> By this definition, then, an unschooled fiddler is one who has not had this kind of formal training. He may (and in most cases will) have had positive assistance from other fiddlers, perhaps within his family

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Merriam, The Anthropology of Music (Evanston, 1964), p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 146.



or his circle of friends, but such instruction will normally have been casual and unsystematic. His musical education will also have contained a strongly imitative element and much of his repertoire will have been learned through practice (again rather unsystematic) of what he has already observed and remembered in the playing of his peers.

It is important to remember, too, that the unschooled fiddler will normally have had positive assistance largely from other fiddlers who were themselves unschooled or semi-schooled (otherwise such assistance might be formal and systematic). By implication this suggests more than merely a way of playing the fiddle, but also a particular view of the fiddle tradition and of the fiddler's role in it and in his society.

A schooled fiddler is, however, one who, in addition to many of the unsystematic aspects of learning and the absorption of the norms and variables of the tradition through oral tradition, has at some time undergone a period of formal training of reasonable length (at least two years). This training will almost always have been in violin technique and in the nontechnical aspects of violin-playing (such as 'expression', phrasing, etc.). It follows, too, that fiddlers with this kind of training will tend to have a more formal, definite view of the tradition and traditional style, a more individualistic view of the value and use of fiddle music -- and perhaps a more individualistic, competitive approach to its performance.

Of course, the schooled and unschooled fiddler represent, in a sense, opposite poles of the world of the Scots traditional fiddler,

and there are some who fall between them; however, it might be useful to adopt a third, subsidiary category — semi-schooled — for those fiddlers who, though basically unschooled, have, at some stage (often well after the initial learning period), undergone a short period of formal training. A few of my informants, while at school or during an apprenticeship, were able to take violin lessons for a short period (perhaps only a term of ten lessons, usually described as 'a quarter') limited often by financial reasons or the difficulty of finding a violin teacher in rural areas. These acquired little more, usually, than adequate musical literacy and some preconceptions about how to hold the instrument (though it could also be said that stylistic preconceptions associated with violin-playing, like vibrato and even tone-production, were learned in this way as being desirable whether or not the player could put them into practice). But the semi-schooled fiddler may not be very different from the unschooled except in a tendency, perhaps, to attach greater importance to the printed musical text as a model of the performance.

#### Musical Influences and the Novice Fiddler

Samuel Bayard, in a study of traditional fiddle-playing in Western Pennsylvania writes that, "In every case an individual player's background has been rich in folk music, with elder musicians of the immediate family or neighbourhood".<sup>13</sup> Certainly, this applies to fiddlers in Strathspey, and one might go further to say that even

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<sup>13</sup>S.P. Bayard, "Some Folk Fiddlers' Habits and Styles in Western Pennsylvania," IFMC Journal, 1956, p. 16.

in cases where a fiddler grew up in a family which contained no older fiddlers, most families contained a piper or melodion or whistle player on whose instruments the fiddle tunes were played. It was still possible, then, for the fiddler to become familiar with some of his basic repertoire before he began to play the fiddle. John Ferguson of Cambridge, for example, learned some of his repertoire from his father's concertina-playing and his uncle's piping.<sup>14</sup>

The family environment is, then, the most important factor in the continuance of an oral tradition. Often the elders of the family will take pride in the musical tradition which is part of the continuity of family life, and children will be encouraged to continue it.

Secondly, in rural communities such as those in the Spey Valley, notable musicians of the area, accepted as the best fiddlers for dances or weddings, and therefore occupying a position of some prestige, were admired and listened to by the novice fiddler. In addition to these (and a source of new repertoire) were travelling musicians, such as tinker pipers and fiddlers, relatively common before the Second World War.

Finally, there was the concert fiddler of whom the most celebrated and, especially for the older fiddlers, the most influential, was James Scott Skinner (1843-1927). Skinner might be described as the schooled fiddler par excellence. He was regarded as the ideal fiddler by most of my informants. If few unschooled players could ever hope to emulate him in technique, his

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<sup>14</sup>SA 1973/141/B.

prestige was such that a whole generation of fiddlers came under the influence of his style, through public performances, gramophone records, and his compositions which became an important part of the modern fiddler's repertoire.

### Music in the Family

John Grant's remark, "I got music from every side . . . ", quoted at the beginning of this chapter, succinctly summarises the kind of socio-musical environment provided by the families of most of my informants in Strathspey, to a greater or lesser degree. It is quite common for musicians, 'traditional' and 'non-traditional', to claim a musical family background, though less essential in a musically literate society. I have already mentioned the importance attached to the concept of the Strathspey tradition by Speyside fiddlers and its meanings for them -- to do with the 'old days' of their youth when social life in the area was more vital, and with 'Scottishness' as well as enjoyment in making music that is of them and the tradition of their country. Their consciousness of family tradition, of a musical 'inheritance', is made more tangible by the instruments themselves, which are often handed down as heirlooms over two or three generations or more. The existence of such heirlooms within a family is, of course, itself an insurance towards the continuance of an oral musical tradition providing its own form of incentive for a child to learn to play.

It is not unusual for a family to possess more than one fiddle. In some cases the old family fiddle may no longer be in playing condition for various reasons, although it would not be given away lightly. An extra fiddle would often be for everyday use, at least

in former times when fiddles could be got for as little as a pound (before the War, according to John Grant). John Grant rarely plays his father's fiddle (which was inherited from his grandfather); he prefers the harder sound and greater volume of a more recent instrument, though in violin terms it might be thought of as inferior.

### The Beginnings of Learning

Merriam suggests that the simplest and most undifferentiated form of music learning occurs through imitation, which tends to be limited to early learning.<sup>15</sup> However, we might regard this as a second stage in the learning process, preceded by learning at a less conscious, more basic level in which a child absorbs some of the norms of his native idiom and perhaps even the beginnings of an awareness of musical structure and, later, of part of the repertoire. Several Speyside fiddlers remember something of the family musical environment before they began to play -- the mother singing, the father playing the fiddle or the melodion by the fireside in the evenings. Indeed, it is perhaps appropriate that the hearth, which in so many cultures is symbolic of the heart of family life, was at the centre of many fiddlers' early musical education.

Bayard suggests that the Pennsylvania fiddler absorbs and memorizes a number of tunes before he begins to learn the mechanics of playing the instrument,<sup>16</sup> and we can see evidence of the same happening in Strathspey. John Grant, for example, remembers

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<sup>15</sup>Merriam, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>16</sup>Bayard, op. cit., p. 16.

listening, at an early age, to his father playing on winter evenings by the fireside, and he claims to have learned several tunes in that way before he attempted to play the fiddle seriously. In fact, he was twenty-one before he tried to play in public (perhaps out of respect to the memory of his father, who died when John was barely ten).

To the question, "How did you learn to play the fiddle?", informants often replied with the self-explanatory, "Oh, my father was a fiddler" (Fred Reid, Dufftown),<sup>17</sup> stressing the importance of the father-son relationship among traditional musicians. Fiddle-playing in Scotland was until recently an overwhelmingly male preserve, undoubtedly for social reasons, such as the common disapproval of women taking part in activities associated with drinking. This applies largely to unschooled fiddlers, whose main spheres of socio-musical activity were playing for dances, in farm bothies and in pubs. Women were, and are still, more commonly found among schooled fiddlers at competitions and in fiddle bands — situations accepted as being more respectable. There may also have been an easier acceptance among boys, in an area where traditional music-making was common, of the role of a fiddler as a recognisably masculine one; boys in an urban environment could certainly not be expected to show as great an interest in, for example, violin-playing. The father was, however, not always the only educative agent of traditional music within the Speyside family, and I shall discuss the influence of the mother later. John Grant learned a number of

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<sup>17</sup>SA 1973/142.

tunes from listening to his father's playing -- most of them among the older tunes in his repertoire -- such as the "Reel o' Tulloch," "The Mason's Apron," and the "Bob o' Fettercairn," but he learned many others from his mother.

#### Other Instruments as Learning Media

Households in which music was regarded as of value, and where an elder was himself a practising fiddler, often contained one or more other instruments such as a melodion or concertina. Some fiddlers having easy access to these instruments, learned to play tunes on them before graduating to the fiddle which was more difficult to play; and since a good proportion of the repertoire is playable on these instruments as well as the fiddle, dance tunes and some of the structural and stylistic requirements of playing dance music could be learned in this way by quite young children. Particularly useful in this respect was the trump, or 'jew's harp', which could be learned quickly and was very cheap to buy. Merriam mentions instances of children in Africa using 'toy' instruments on which to imitate the playing of their elders<sup>18</sup>, though the parallel here is not exact since the trump merely provided a means of learning repertoire rather than of learning techniques peculiar to the fiddle. Those fiddlers who remembered owning a trump in childhood tended to regard it very much as a 'toy' not to be taken as a serious musical instrument (except for Willie Reid, who still plays it).

#### Learning the Fiddle -- the Early Stages

Most informants thought that they had begun to learn to play the fiddle before the age of ten, usually as early as eight or nine.

In John Grant's case, early attempts were made around this age, though he says he "didn't take it up properly" until the comparatively late age of twenty-one. But certainly he had acquired a reasonable degree of competence long before then.

The first stage in learning to play the fiddle naturally involved tuning the instrument. Most informants remember this as the first piece of direct instruction they received from an elder. John Grant says that his father had a 'mute' (pitch-pipe) which provided the four pitches required, but this was not necessary after the correct pitch relationships had been learned. (See App. I, p.179) We may assume, I think, that long familiarity with the sound of the open fifth, itself inherent in the harmonic-melodic structure of so much of the most familiar repertoire, would have made it possible for the novice fiddler to learn the tuning system fairly quickly. An element of imitation at the simplest level was likely to be strong here. Some degree of trial and error is likely, and an example from Shetland illustrates this: a fiddler is quoted as having, by private experiment, tuned his first fiddle to 'doh, me, soh, doh', and was able to play a simple tune, though later, he adds, "I discovered myself, by ear, that it was wrong".<sup>19</sup>

Fiddlers invariably began by learning slow tunes of limited compass -- slow airs, hymn tunes, and the like. John Grant's first tune was Crimond (see App. I), a metrical psalm tune usually sung

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<sup>18</sup>Merriam, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>19</sup>P. Cooke, "Shetland Fiddle Music," documentary booklet for Tangent disc TNGM117, London, 1973, p. 3.



to the "Lord's My Shepherd" (and other informants gave this as their first attempt). Popular Scots songs like "Auld Lang Syne" were also used, but hymn and psalm tunes seemed more common amongst the older fiddlers, whose childhood had generally been strictly Calvinistic. Bayard, too, found that Pennsylvania fiddlers "began with some simple song or hymn tune" and I have found that hymn tunes were usually given by older fiddlers elsewhere, an example from Deeside being, "There is a Happy Land".<sup>20</sup> The musical reasons for the choice of hymn tunes is obvious. They are usually non-chromatic, rhythmically square (allowing a single bow per note) and have a good deal of step-wise melodic movement within a restricted compass. And rigorously enforced attendance at church made them familiar even to the youngest children.

It is impossible to say whether any of the basic elements of a fiddler's style could have been apparent in the earliest stages of learning. It seems more likely, indeed, that such elements as the 'ringing' open string, fifths characteristic of John Grant's and some other unschooled fiddlers' playing, were discouraged at the learning stage by some older fiddlers. John Grant says that his father, who could read music, would have given him 'a slap' if he heard him playing in this way. Indeed, his father's musical literacy may have encouraged him to believe that 'chording' a tune, as John Grant calls it, was wrong -- though perhaps this only applies to slow tunes, where most fiddlers, including Mr. Grant, try to avoid it. One would expect other stylistic features, such as ornamentation, to appear at a much later stage. Most fiddlers in

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<sup>20</sup> Sandy Beattie of Aboyne, SA 1973/105.

Strathspey use them only in dance tunes or marches, not in slow tunes like those they learned first. In fact, this is hardly surprising, since fiddlers like John Grant seem unable to talk about ornamentation, to explain how they do it or even to demonstrate it slowly -- suggesting that more than most aspects of style, it may be a function of what is usually termed muscular memory and can only have been learned at a later imitative stage, when physical coordination is well established.

Bayard's researches in Western Pennsylvania show that in many cases "a child would have his hands laid in position on the finger-board, and be shown how to grasp the bow,"<sup>21</sup> but he adds that informants remembered little more about direct instruction by adults. John Grant was given similar assistance by his father: "He showed me how to play the scale and I never forget it" (see App. I, p.178 ). However, it is less likely that Speyside novices were shown how to hold the bow; (unless the father was at least semi-schooled); most unschooled Scots fiddlers hold the bow in any position that they find comfortable.

Clearly this type of instruction, though positive and directed in the sense of 'schooling', concerns only elementary technical aspects of the learning process. It is unlikely that the unschooled Strathspey fiddler, in 'teaching' a son to play, made a particularly positive or systematic contribution to instructing the novice beyond this level; since he himself probably lacked a sufficiently analytical knowledge of the playing techniques he

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<sup>21</sup> Bayard, op. cit., p. 17.

employed. His teaching was more likely concerned with negative criticism of mistakes coupled with the example of his own playing. John Grant adopted this method when showing a violinist how to play the "Reel o' Tulloch", repeating the tune line by line until the pupil had grasped it by imitation. The same teaching method, sometimes involving the punishment of mistakes, is found in other cultures, notably in the 'art' musics of Java and Bali.

### Diddling

The art of diddling -- singing dance tunes to non-lexical vocables -- is still cultivated in some rural areas of North-East Scotland and, as part of the folk revival, as a competitive form in traditional music festivals. While diddling has had various musical functions, as a musical instrument substitute for dance in the past as well as a means of exchanging tunes among instrumentalists, it can also have an educative function. John Grant remembers that his mother diddled for the children to dance to at home, ". . . they would have maybe a go at the Highland Fling and she would diddle for them" (see App. I, p. 180). But she was also able to teach him tunes by diddling them while he tried to copy them on the fiddle, "She would keep on diddlin' there until I . . . got it right". In fact, his mother was a Gaelic speaker, and he remembers that she used Gaelic words for some tunes; possibly they were puirt a beul verses.

Mothers were often important encouraging influences on apparently musical children, in some ways giving more encouragement than the fathers -- at least in a more general sense -- and this is a factor that was noticed in the Irish context by Koning.<sup>22</sup>

Another example comes from Shetland, where Andrew Polson of Whalsay recalls learning tunes from his mother's diddling,<sup>23</sup>

She used to sing, you see, and we used to dance, just  
young boys . . . and I think I picked them up faster  
when I was younger than I probably would do now, and  
I knew a lot of them and I never lost them.

John Grant's mother came from a fiddling family and her knowledge of the repertoire was probably extensive. It is difficult to say, though, whether she could have transmitted any elements of fiddle style in her singing, such as the irregular rhythmic style characteristic of Mr. Grant's strathspey playing. This particular aspect of fiddle style is clearly evident in the diddling of another fiddler, Willie Reid.<sup>24</sup> But he may be an exception.

#### Mass Media -- Gramophone and Radio

Gramophone records of traditional dance music have been available in Strathspey since the early years of the century (initially in cylinder form) and radio since the 1930's. Records, especially, being permanently available in the home, had a strong influence on fiddlers like John Grant who learned a considerable number of tunes from them.

The extraordinary popularity of Scott Skinner among Scots fiddlers in the first quarter of the century can be attributed partly to the development of the gramophone during that period. Skinner made a large number of recordings, both on cylinder and on disc, and

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<sup>22</sup>Koning, op. cit. p. 172.

<sup>23</sup>P. Cooke, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>24</sup>SA 1973/243.

most of my older informants owned at least some of these in their youth -- so that all were familiar with Skinner's style and compositions; although not all of them heard him in person on his frequent concert tours of North-East Scotland. Some fiddlers claim to have learned tunes, and to have 'copied' Skinner's playing style from the recordings. An account of a similar (modern) practice comes again from Shetland where "the tape recorders has helpit the boys playing the fiddle noo, for they're copying a lot off the wireless . . . "25 John Grant provides a more detailed account of the method he used,

If I got . . . a record wi Strathspeys an reels on it  
I played it over three or four times maybe . . . maybe  
five, six times tae hear im . . . hear im playin it,  
like, right . . . ye could take the gramyphone back  
. . . ye could follow him, he would play it slow . . .  
ye'll learn it that . . . like anything . . . I would  
let im go at it till I jist got it right in ma heid tae . . .  
ye know . . . an then I would take the fiddle an I would  
follow im . . .

(App. I, p. 181)

Portable acoustic-type gramophones, and the discs themselves, were inexpensive and fiddlers like John Grant collected traditional music records, particularly those of Skinner, in large numbers. As Mr. Grant says, too, the gramophone (which was clockwork and had a variable-speed control) could be slowed down by a fiddler who wanted to learn the finer points of an especially difficult tune. Radio broadcasts of fiddle music and dance music played by country dance bands have an attentive audience among Strathspey fiddlers who frequently 'pick up' new tunes from them. John Grant

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<sup>25</sup>Cited in Peter Cooke, op. cit., p. 10.

has a liking for Shetland fiddle music (which has been more widely promoted on radio programmes in recent years), though he has not learned to play any specifically Shetland tunes.

Informants who have learned a tune from a gramophone record will sometimes claim that their version of the tune is exactly the same — in style and structure. John Grant learned his version of "Maggie Cameron" from Skinner's recording, and claims that "he played the same way I play it". Mr. Grant's playing style in this and other tunes is, however, far removed from that of Skinner, judging from the evidence we have of Skinner's style (his recording of "Maggie Cameron" is not available). It is not, of course, possible to say whether John Grant's version was more like that of Skinner (as represented in Harp and Claymore ) when he originally learned it, but evidence suggests that his playing style has changed only in very minor detail over the last twenty-five years. Recordings made in 1952 (SA 1952/79 ) show that his tune versions were by then 'set' into a stylistic pattern which he still reproduces today. One would expect, then, that change would have been comparatively slight over the preceding twenty years from the initial learning period. Bayard writes that, "players are often convinced that they render tunes just as they have learned them; but changes are bound to creep in, and some of these must surely be due to differences of skill between players".<sup>26</sup>

Both of these statements would apply equally to Speyside fiddlers, but we may expect changes to be greater in the early stages of learning a piece, when the player's own variant is likely to be more

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<sup>26</sup>Bayard, op. cit., p. 17.

fluid and open to influences, than in later stages when the variant has 'set' in most aspects of style and structure. Some aspects of structure are variable. The tempo, for example, was faster in John Grant's 1952 recording of "Maggie Cameron". Such variation can be dependant on the performing situation; in this case the earlier recording was made under less relaxed, studio-like conditions. Stylistically, however, there is no significant change in the more recently recorded version. We may ask whether very small stylistic changes in a performance over long periods may be related to non-musical change (other than ageing) such as changes in the musician's social background, in the types of social situation in which he performs. Such a long term study is not within the scope of this dissertation, however.

In general, unschooled fiddlers show no inclination to modify or alter their personal variant of a tune deliberately as a result of hearing another version. John Grant, for example, has heard many other fiddlers play the "Reel o' Tulloch" in styles significantly different from his own, and using different melodic variants; but he would not consider altering his own version in imitation of these other players (some of whom he regards as much better players than himself). He owns his version of a tune and would not believe that it is other than the 'correct' one. Semi-schooled players in Strathspey, on the other hand, tended to regard a published version as being 'correct'.

### Practice

We may divide practice, for the unschooled fiddler, into two stages. The first involves the initial process of reaching, by degree, a level of competence acceptable to the fiddler (and to his audience), and the second involves the maintenance of that level which is acceptable both to the musician and to his listeners or dancers. Again, we must rely in part on speculation, since fiddlers are not articulate in describing this rather casual, unsystematic process. A significant factor, however, is the absence of exercises in first obtaining some measure of technical competence. John Grant, as we have seen, began by playing a scale (probably A major), but there was no question of him practising the scale as an exercise in itself; once he had mastered it he immediately began to play simple psalm tunes, ". . . and then when I went in for it right, I said, 'Och, I think I'll . . . I'll keep at the, the . . . slow music'. I was gettin better on at the slow ones, ye see. . . "(App. I, p.178 ). Repeated performance of these simple tunes itself acted as a kind of exercise; the fiddler gained confidence and fluency until he was ready to attempt something slightly more difficult, eventually moving on to a simple reel. John Grant mentions "Mrs. McLeod of Raasay" as one of the easier reels among the first he learned to play. Practice, then, becomes in a sense synonymous with learning; the novice chooses tunes which are already familiar and technically within his capabilities -- by trial and error rejecting those for which he is not yet ready. Practice, for John Grant, involved repeating a tune until he 'got it right'; and most fiddlers in Speyside, having reached an



acceptable degree of fluency, naturally kept in practice by playing regularly at dances, or for pleasure in the house. John Grant played every evening at the fireside when he was younger.

### Motivation

Merriam sees motivation as a variety of means by which an elder may encourage the novice to success in learning.<sup>27</sup> However, he tends to ignore other, less well-defined, areas of motivation. Personal ambition may be fuelled by the possibility of increased status in the community. A personal love for music is, of course, the obvious incentive that must be common to almost all musicians in a non-professional context; but financial reward -- a strong motivation in some areas, such as the pop music business -- can at least be ruled out in Strathspey. The external pressure of parents wishing to see a family tradition continued could also be regarded as a motivating factor.

The fiddler in the Strathspey of John Grant's youth was a valued member of the community -- a 'great man' in Mr. Grant's phrase. A desire to achieve such a position of popularity was strengthened by the special position of the fiddler in the social situations in which he usually participated, such as village dances. A desire to emulate fiddle-heroes like Scott Skinner was another common motivating factor. Many older fiddlers in Strathspey heard Skinner perform in village halls throughout the area and stories still abound among informants of his legendary abilities and of the excitement caused by his visits. John Grant was clearly inspired

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<sup>27</sup>Merriam, op. cit., pp. 150-152.

by such a concert, which he heard at the age of seven or eight with his father in Nethy Bridge. And Fred Reid says that he tried to imitate Skinner's style "as much as I could";<sup>28</sup> although he admits that, since Skinner was what he calls a 'high-class' fiddler, this was technically almost impossible. Fiddle music, well into the 1930's, was popular enough in Speyside for village halls to be packed out for the visit of some well-known performer.

'Motivational techniques,' which act as encouragement directed from a senior musician to a novice, are difficult to discover because of their often casual nature. They include the universal examples of praise, criticism and sarcasm; but may also include mild forms of physical punishment, such as the 'slap' John Grant says he would have got from his father for 'chording' (i.e. using 'ringing' open-string fifths) in a tune. Rewards for good progress included eventual admittance to the ranks of dance fiddler and, in a more formalised situation, the cup or shield awarded to the winner of a fiddle competition. John Grant summarises the attraction of fiddle competitions thus: "Well, the attraction was . . . was to see if you would . . . win the cup or get a prize. That's what ye were goin for. Tae see if you could be . . . make yersel a bit better or something like that" (App. I, p.188). The prospect of success and the consequent social status of winning such a prize was enough to overcome a fiddler's nervousness at playing before a large and critical audience.

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<sup>28</sup>SA 1973/142.

### Conclusion

The learning process, then, represents for the unschooled traditional fiddler, as for any musician in any society, an enormously complex pattern of influences and motivations. I have suggested that, for most of my informants in Speyside, the emphasis on imitation is crucial to the whole process. It is interesting that Suzuki, the Japanese teacher whose methods have had spectacular success in training 'classical' string players, places great emphasis on imitation, especially in the early stages of learning. Cook, in his book on Suzuki's methods, summarises it thus:<sup>29</sup>

If we were to look for key words to describe Mr. Suzuki's method, they would probably be 'listen', 'imitate', and 'balance'. The child listens to the record, to his teacher, to his own tone, constantly tries to imitate the best and to achieve balance in his own playing.

This might adequately describe the learning process that produced traditional fiddlers like John Grant, however remote the formality of Suzuki's teaching from the world of the croft kitchen.

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<sup>29</sup>C.A. Cook, Suzuki Education in Action (New York, 1970), p. 53.

## Chapter 2

## THE FIDDLER'S WORLD

". . . they started a reel . . . on the field -over up there. An they started this reel and they called it the "Reel o Tulloch. . . "

John Grant (App. I, p.183)

The "Reel o Tulloch," one of the oldest and most widely disseminated of all Scottish reels,<sup>30</sup> is undoubtedly a significant part of John Grant's world -- the world of an 'unschooled' fiddler whose life has been spent almost without interruption within the small community of Tulloch, one of the legendary birthplaces of this tune.<sup>31</sup> That Mr. Grant is the only fiddler left in this now depopulated parish, and therefore the last of the countless tradition-bearers who have regarded the "Reel o Tulloch" as peculiarly their own, gives his performance an extra resonance which one cannot subject to the usual procedures of stylistic analysis. It is perhaps symbolic of the imminent end of a part of the Scottish fiddle tradition, of one kind of fiddler, and of one view of what it means to play the music of this tradition.

It is clear, as we have seen, that the spread of musical literacy and the growth in the influence of the mass media, will continue to alter the face of the tradition, and that the 'unschooled' player, like those in Strathspey, with whom we are largely concerned here, will become rarer. Of course such a change is not necessarily a matter for regret, since it could justly be claimed that the performance of

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<sup>30</sup>The "Reel o Tulloch" appears in one of the earliest manuscript collections, The Drummond Castle MS, 1734.

traditional dance music on the fiddle has recently been enjoying new interest as part of the 'folk-revival' and as a competitive activity. However, the question of what the Scottish fiddle tradition is has not been satisfactorily answered, and in this chapter I shall attempt to define it more clearly and to show how 'unschooled' fiddlers like those in Strathspey can be placed within it.

The problem of defining (or of delineating) a musical tradition is a difficult one. To begin with, musical traditions are not static objects to be observed and described as one might a painting or a musical structure composed and printed on paper. Neither are they always single strands of historical development with a limited use and function within a relatively homogeneous society. Some, like the Scottish fiddle tradition, have become rather diffuse socially and geographically and subject to a greater, more complex level of acculturation.

A unitary approach may be unsuited to such a diffuse tradition, and, it may be better to view it as a group of linked traditions, making a division on, for example, a geographical or social basis. Yet that is what the present study has already set out to do, in its identification of the 'unschooled' fiddler as a part of the tradition (or perhaps one might call it a 'sub'-tradition) suited to a degree of separate consideration. The fact that all fiddlers in Scotland have something in common, however, including a repertoire and an awareness of its value and meaning, make them part of a shared tradition -- and it is the various ways in which this tradition manifests itself that

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<sup>31</sup> Variants of the legend appear in books about the district, such as The Secret of Spey (Edinburgh: W. Wood, 1930); and Forsyth, op. cit.

I shall discuss here.

Of the few writers who have discussed the Scottish fiddle tradition in recent years, all have chosen to view it in historical terms, and none have attempted to give a comprehensive account of the contemporary situation. Their historical approach tends to be selective and concerned with developments in musical structure and to some extent with musical style, though performance-style is hardly discussed at all. The three authors who have produced major works dealing with Scots fiddle music are Collinson (The Traditional and National Music of Scotland, London, 1966), Emmerson (Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String, London, 1971; and A Social History of Scottish Dance, Montreal and London, 1972), and Johnson (Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century, London, 1972). Of these, Collinson and Emmerson (Rantin' Pipe . . .) take what one might call a simple chronological view of the tradition. Collinson discusses early manuscripts and traces developments in musical style and structure through the compositions of notable individual fiddler-composers, though his account stops at the death of J. Scott Skinner in 1927. Emmerson's work, sub-titled 'A History of Scottish Dance Music,' is intended as a companion volume to his Social History of Scottish Dance, and as such is certainly more of a 'social history' of the music than Collinson's work (where fiddle music is in any case allotted only a single chapter) with a separate chapter on musical structure and its relationship to dance-forms. But here again the tendency is to present the historical aspect of the subject as a chronological succession of noted individuals, concentrating especially on the fiddler-composers, on anecdotes connected with their lives and on the

innovations, stylistic and behavioural, which they are reported to have introduced into the tradition. There is, of course, some justification for this approach, given that much of the documentary information concerns such famous personages as were considered worthy of mention by contemporary writers, and given the at least partial truth of the assumption that individuals do have an important role to play in the shaping of a musical tradition.

However, both of these writers (Collinson especially) opt for a largely descriptive account, making little attempt at an interpretation of the fairly extensive body of information at their disposal; so that the impression left is of a rather bewildering succession of composers, performers and musical styles, with very little knowledge of the way fiddlers play and their own view of the tradition, and with no clear idea of how the various parts of this complex tradition are related. Emmerson does provide a valuable account of the social context of Scottish traditional dance, and some information on the fiddler's role in the dance, in his Social History, but again we are given relatively little information on musical behaviour.

The result of this kind of approach is a tendency to regard the tradition as essentially a single unit, of which the core is a repertoire handed down over three centuries or so through oral tradition and print; and the assumption is that all fiddlers, because they play more or less the same music are, in effect, the same kind of musician within a sliding scale of technical competence from the virtuoso Scott Skinner to the humblest village fiddler. Some attention is given, naturally, to regional variations in playing-style<sup>32</sup> but on the whole the repertoire, the unifying factor, is seen as the

embodiment of the tradition, and those fiddlers whose reputations have travelled beyond purely parochial boundaries (for various reasons -- the most common in the present day being exposure on radio or on disc) are regarded as being representative of the whole.

As we shall see, these 'noted individuals' of the fiddler's world have tended, more and more over the last century and a half, to be 'schooled' rather than 'unschooled' fiddlers and the style of these players as well as their attitudes and the contexts within which they perform have been the main subject of those who have written about the tradition. It can be demonstrated that these players, particularly in attitude and partly in style, have moved away from the 'unschooled' fiddler in the last hundred years, so that the 'unschooled' player has been largely ignored or simply regarded as being beneath the required level of competence in traditional terms -- not only by scholars but by the 'schooled' players and connoisseurs of the tradition themselves.

Johnson, in his study of the relationship between 'art' and 'folk' music in eighteenth-century Scotland, is extremely dismissive of the 'unschooled' fiddler of the time:<sup>33</sup>

Certainly there were illiterate fiddlers in many parts of Scotland at the time, who had no contact with classical music at all. I do not regard such players as this taking an important part in the transmission and development of the repertory.

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<sup>32</sup>For Example, Collinson, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>33</sup>Johnson, op. cit. p. 112.



And he makes the same kind of generalisation about the situation as it exists today.<sup>34</sup>

. . . in fact, folk-fiddling, as it exists in Scotland today, was almost entirely an eighteenth-century creation; and it was developed by educated musicians, most of whom were at home in the classical music culture.

Firstly, it should be noted that 'transmission' and 'development' are not necessarily the activities of a single group of musicians. There is no reason to suppose that 'transmission,' of the oral variety was not as important among 'illiterate' fiddlers as transmission through print was among the 'educated musicians' of the time; and of course, 'illiterate' (or unschooled) fiddlers can only learn their repertoire by oral transmission. Johnson seems to be saying that the 'unschooled' players of the eighteenth century were, because of their 'illiteracy', excluded from the development of the tradition (by which, one assumes, he means the composition of new repertoire and the introduction thereby of new elements of style), and played a purely passive role.

To some degree this must have been the case. As Johnson demonstrates throughout his chapter on fiddle music, the influence of 'classical' violin style by immigrant Italian and German musicians on much traditional fiddle composition of the late eighteenth century is clearly evident -- though Emerson would probably contend that he exaggerates his case.<sup>35</sup>

Niel Gow, William Marshall, Robert Petrie and the many other notable fiddler-composers whose work reached the printed page, were largely country-bred, self-taught fiddlers, and there is no hint of Corelli in their compositions. Perhaps they were influenced by the classical bowing technique which, possibly in the case

of Marshall, suggested a wider sweep of melody; but that is about all.

Emmerson would appear to be confusing music style with playing style here, for if classical violin technique had only a partial and by no means overwhelming influence on the traditional performance styles, the effect of classical music style in diluting the traditional characteristics of the Scottish idiom (the flattened seventh, hexatonic melodic formulae, etc.) is often quite obvious in compositions of the period, as Johnson shows. It would seem, then, that musical 'development' must have been largely instigated by the 'educated musicians' that Johnson mentions, among whom one must include Niel Gow and William Marshall who were musically literate (and therefore 'semi-schooled' at least) despite Emmerson's (no doubt accurate) contention that they were 'self-taught'.

They, and others like them, had already begun to move in rather different circles from the average unschooled fiddler of the day, being employed as professional or semi-professional fiddlers on the estates of the aristocracy (the Dukes of Athole in the case of Gow, and the Duke of Gordon in the case of Marshall) so that their contact with lovers and practitioners of classical music must have been considerable.

Johnson's picture, therefore, of a tradition being expanded and propagated largely by a fairly select élite is a plausible one, but

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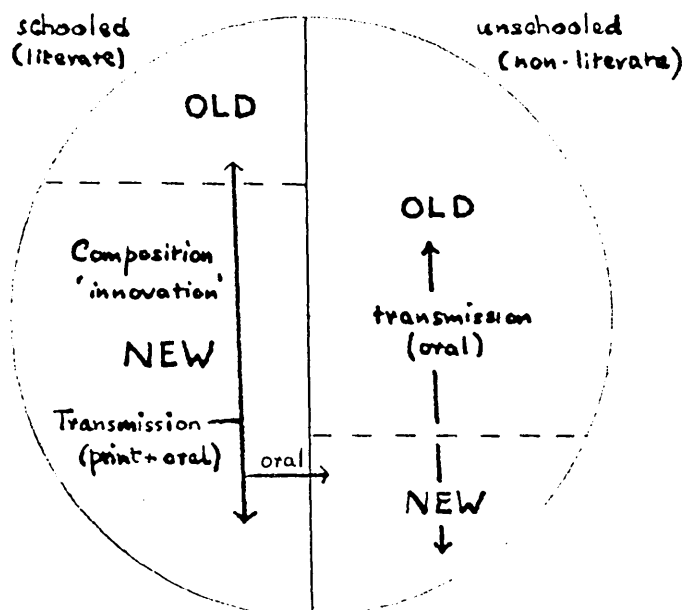
<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>35</sup>G.S. Emmerson, Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String (London: J.M. Dent, 1971), p. 179.

the problem with this thesis is that it ignores what was clearly a large section, perhaps a majority, of the fiddlers of the day, including village musicians, itinerant tinker-fiddlers and others who could not have been much concerned with 'developing' the repertoire itself.

But contact between these fiddlers and the schooled fiddlers must have been frequent enough for newly composed tunes to pass into the oral tradition -- indeed there is no reason to suppose that print was the only means of transmission even among those fiddlers who were literate. Inevitably, though, the unschooled fiddlers, lacking access to the growing industry of publishing traditional dance music collections (especially at the very end of the eighteenth century<sup>36</sup>), must have absorbed the quickly-expanding new repertoire relatively slowly, and then probably only in part. The situation can be shown thus in simple diagram<sup>m</sup>atic form:

Figure 1. Repertoire distribution and transmission c. 1780-1800.



<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 84, note.

The circle represents the whole repertoire, 'old' (i.e. that already current in oral tradition) and 'new' (i.e. the new dance tunes, most of which were being published in 'collections') music; and each half of the circle is divided proportionately (very approximately) according to the possible composition of the repertoires of unschooled and schooled fiddlers of the time.

What the unschooled fiddler of the late eighteenth century did play is, of course, a matter of conjecture, since virtually no records exist on the subject. However, the contents of fiddle manuscripts and collections in the first half of that century give some clue as to the kind of tunes which were current at the time before published collections and the semi-professional 'schooled' fiddler-composer became widespread. The Drummond Castle MS<sup>37</sup>, for example, includes the "Reel o Tulloch," the "Duke of Perth's Reel," "Gille Calum," and "Caber Feidh," all likely to figure in the fiddler's repertoire at the beginning of the eighteenth century; though they were probably also played by pipers. Playford's collection of 1700<sup>38</sup> includes "Deal Stick the Minister," among other tunes which are still played by fiddlers.

The second of the two statements I have quoted from Johnson's book is, however, more difficult to accept. In defining the present-day Scots fiddle tradition as "almost entirely an eighteenth-century creation", he seems to ignore not only a large proportion of the repertoire of today but, I would suggest, a significant body of the fiddlers. An examination of the current repertoire lists of my

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<sup>37</sup>Op. cit., 1734.

<sup>38</sup>Henry Playford, A Collection of Original Scotch Tunes (London, 1700).

Speyside informants shows that tunes of specifically eighteenth-century origin are certainly no more numerous than the comparatively recent compositions of J. Scott Skinner, and that pipe-tunes (marches particularly) have an important place, as well as tunes dating from before the early part of the eighteenth century like the "Reel o Tulloch," "Gille Calum," and the "Bob o Fettercairn". Stylistically, too, there is nothing in the playing of these unschooled fiddlers to suggest the influence of classical violin technique as we shall see in Part II. However, the repertoire and style of many present-day schooled fiddlers quite clearly is substantially eighteenth-century in content and practice as is confirmed by the recordings of (to take two prominent examples) Hector McAndrew<sup>39</sup> of Cults and Florence Burns<sup>40</sup> of Aberdeen in the archive of the School of Scottish Studies.

It would seem, then, that Johnson's approach takes no account of the unschooled fiddler as being a part of the tradition, but regards the schooled player as being entirely representative. The selectivity of this view cannot, I would suggest, give us an understanding of the whole tradition as it exists today. The fact is that unschooled players, however unfavourably they may seem to compare in some respects of technique with schooled players, do continue to play the instrument in a 'traditional' manner and using 'traditional' repertoire. As we shall see they differ in many aspects of style and in attitude from 'schooled' fiddlers, but they remain undoubtedly part of the tradition.

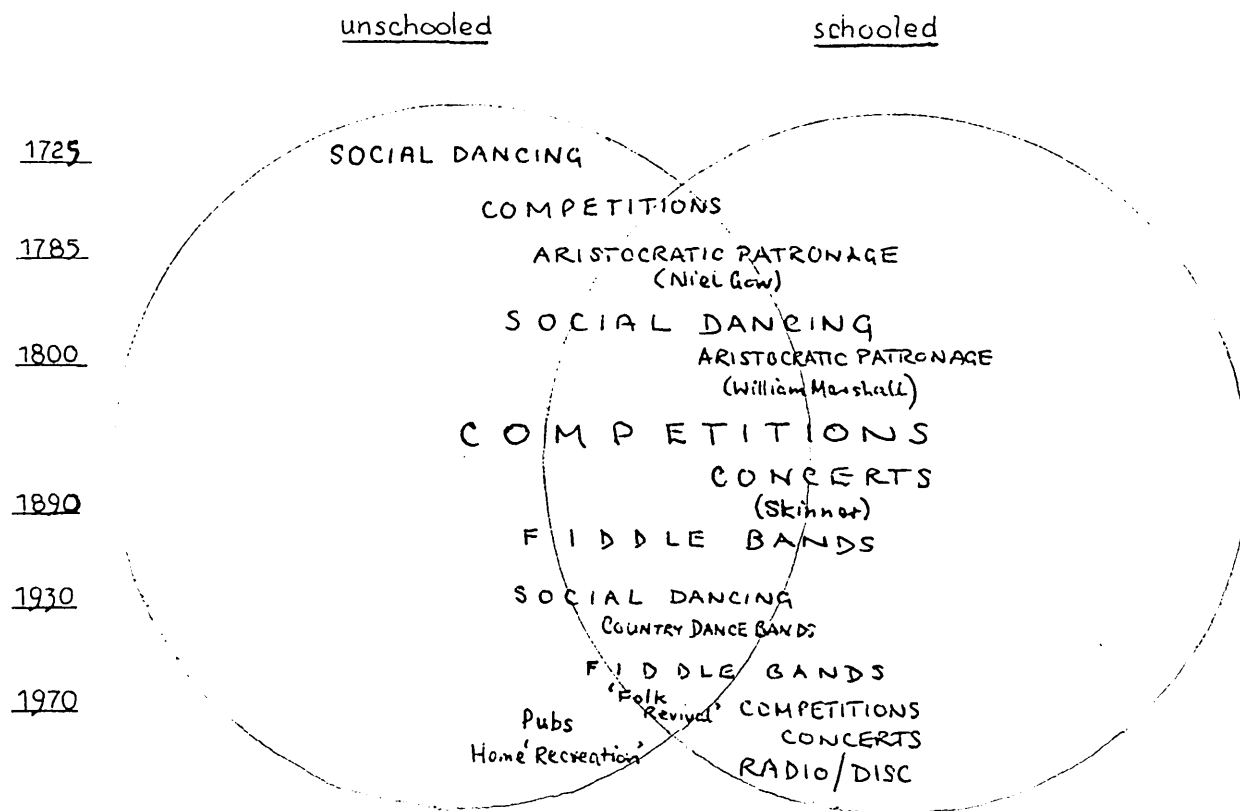
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<sup>39</sup>See Tape SA 1959/7 as representative.

<sup>40</sup>See Tape SA 1973/107.

We can show the historical development away from an almost completely non-professional,<sup>41</sup> unschooled fiddle tradition in the second half of the seventeenth century to a tradition 'split' between schooled and unschooled at the beginning of the present century by the following diagram.

Figure 2. Schooled and unschooled fiddlers.



<sup>41</sup>One famous exception was Patie Birnie (born c. 1635), an itinerant fiddler of Kinghorn, Fife; but he was very much of the vagabond musician type. See R. Chambers, Scottish Songs Prior to Burns (Edinburgh, 1890).

Figure 2 represents a generalisation in pictorial form of the socio-historical development of the whole of the Scots fiddle tradition since the eighteenth century. It does not take account of movements in centres of activity from one geographical area to another, though a case might be made showing such a movement from Perthshire (the Gows and many others) in the late eighteenth century to Aberdeenshire and the North East (Skinner, Hector McAndrew, J. F. Dickie, William Hardie, etc.) in the last century. The figure cannot embrace all of the social situations in which traditional fiddlers have participated musically.

The two spheres encompass the whole body of traditional fiddlers and their principal activities since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Naturally, there is a sizeable area at the intersection of the spheres where the schooled and unschooled fiddler occupy common ground, but the basic diagonal shift of emphasis from unschooled to schooled over the last 270 years can be clearly seen in the construction of the diagram. Some significant aspects of the growth of the tradition are illustrated. The two most important are:

1.) The fiddler and social dancing.

The popularity of Scottish traditional dances among the middle and upper classes from the eighteenth century onwards led, as we have seen, to the emergence, toward the end of that century, of the professional dance-fiddler under the patronage of the wealthy. These players, of whom Niel Gow was the most celebrated, performed a function not unlike that of court musicians of the period in Austria and Germany, since musical composition was almost as important as part of their activities as performance.

Gow himself seems to have been largely 'unschooled' in his youth<sup>42</sup>, though he clearly acquired some reasonable degree of musical literacy later in life. His son Nathaniel (1748-1831), who succeeded him as the most celebrated professional fiddler of his time, was at least 'semi-schooled', having had formal tuition under various fiddlers including his father, and cello lessons from Joseph Reinagle, later Professor of Music at Oxford. William Marshall is generally described as 'self-taught' though he, also, must have become sufficiently literate in music to compose several tunes in flat (i.e. non-'traditional') keys, in order to prevent others from performing them.

We can assume, I think, that non-professional fiddlers who played at dances in rural areas during this period and through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries must have been largely unschooled; but it seems equally likely that, from Niel Gow onwards, the fiddlers employed to play for the aristocracy became more and more part of the semi-schooled or schooled categories, partly as a result of their contact with classically-trained musicians. Thus the diagram shows 'social dancing' as a performing situation moving from the unschooled sphere into the common schooled-unschooled area at the end of the eighteenth century.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the 'schooled' fiddler (led by the example of Scott Skinner) had moved away from the dance as a performing milieu, to the concert hall and the competition, so that we find the unschooled and semi-schooled players left as practitioners of fiddle-



playing for the dance. In one sense, then, the situation in the twentieth century has returned to that of the early eighteenth century, though even unschooled fiddlers no longer play regularly for dances in more than a few isolated cases as their position has been largely supplanted, since the Second World War, by the accordion. Meanwhile, as the diagram shows, the schooled fiddler has moved decisively, in the present century, into the position of concert performer. The function of the dance music that remains the basis of his repertoire is now quite different, and indeed it could be said that the music itself, though superficially largely the same in terms of its 'surface structure,' is also different in terms of the ways in which it is perceived by performer and listener.

2.) The fiddler and competitive performance.

Fiddle competitions have a long history in Scotland and, indeed, in the other parts of Europe.<sup>43</sup>

In 1328 and 1365 fiddlers gathered together in Malines, and in 1354 in Deventer, for 'advanced courses of instruction,' and many medieval sources tell of sizeable conventions held by minstrels at which champion pipers and fiddlers were chosen, though such assemblies were primarily designed to strengthen ties between minstrels, and to deal with questions of organization.

But while the competitive aspect of these early gatherings may have been subsidiary, it clearly grew in importance (at least in Scotland) with the increasing social status of the 'profes-

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<sup>42</sup>Collinson, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>43</sup>W. Bachmann, The Origins of Bowing (London: O.U.P., 1969), p. 123.

sional' fiddler in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the competition from which Niel Gow emerged as 'champion fiddler of Scotland' at Perth in 1745 would seem to have been held with the express purpose of choosing such a champion, rather than providing for greater fellowship among fiddlers. And, if the reported remarks of the blind judge that he "could distinguish the stroke of Niel's bow among a hundred players"<sup>44</sup> are accurate it would seem that the result was more a confirmation of his reputation than the creation of it.

However, as figure 2 shows, the kind of fiddler most likely to be successful in fiddle competitions is now rather different from that of the eighteenth century. Niel Gow, in 1745 aged only 18, was then an unschooled fiddler, though obviously one of rare accomplishment, whereas in the present century, the competition has become one of the most important performing situations of the schooled player. In John Grant's youth, in the 1920's and 30's, it was still possible for an unschooled player to succeed in a small local competition -- such as that held annually by the Grantown-on-Spey Strathspey and Reel Society which John Grant, Alec Grant and John Ferguson of Carrbridge all won on various occasions. But, with few exceptions, prizes in present-day competitions are won by schooled fiddlers and judged by schooled fiddlers, or more often, by classically trained musicians with no obvious connection with traditional music. Thus, the nationwide fiddle competition sponsored at

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<sup>44</sup>Collinson, op. cit., p. 214.

Perth in 1969 by the National Broadcasting Council for Scotland numbered only one traditional fiddler among its jury (whose other three members were classically-trained musicians, including Yehudi Menuhin), and all four prizes were awarded to schooled fiddlers (Arthur Robertson, William MacPherson, Angus Cameron and Florence Burns).<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the annual festival of the Elgin Strathspey and Reel Society<sup>46</sup> in 1973 was won by a schooled fiddler, Angus Cameron; and judged by a classically-trained non-fiddler from the BBC's staff in Glasgow, Robert Crawford.

Fiddle competitions are rarely now won by farmworkers or other artisans, and the four prizewinners at Perth were, respectively, a company manager and three schoolteachers. The reasons for this are clear: schooled fiddlers are now in the majority; to some extent they represent the predominantly urban revival of interest in the fiddle tradition and the comparatively recent improvement in musical education. As we shall see in Part II, they also represent attitudes to traditional style and to the general requirements for 'good' fiddle-playing which are still strongly influenced by those of the late nineteenth century. Clearly, too, the much stronger position of the accordion as an accompaniment to dancing has, since the 1920's, forced the fiddler to see performance in terms of playing to an audience, and the performance is seen more as an end in itself. It may seem curious that those who organise competitions, generally fiddlers themselves, should so often choose a non-traditional musician

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<sup>45</sup>A recording of the winning performances was published by the BBC: Scottish Fiddlers to the Fore (BBC Records REB84M, London, 1970).

as adjudicator, but this can be seen as consistent with their apparent desire for the respected opinion of an 'educated' musician, a psychological need for an endorsement of their music as 'art' from the world of 'art music'.

The repertoire of the schooled fiddler, too, is more suited than that of the unschooled to the kind of modern competition I have described, including, as it usually does, many of those tunes<sup>by</sup> Scott Skinner and other more recent composers which are technically beyond an unschooled fiddler like John Grant. Indeed, older traditional tunes like "Deil among the Tailors" or "Miss Drummond of Perth" which are typical of the tunes John Grant plays most, would be considered too easy for a modern championship competition.<sup>47</sup>

The fiddle competition is, then, no longer really a part of the world of an unschooled fiddler like John Grant. The competitions he entered as a young man were small-scale, local affairs, and competitors were mostly members either of the 'Strathspey and reel society' (fiddle band) which organised it, or of similar groups in the region. The Elgin Competition, however, though by no means one of the most important, attracts fiddlers from the whole of North-East Scotland and a few from much farther afield. It is usual for competitors to wear formal evening dress, and one of the competition classes is entitled "Ensemble-maximum four players" in which the prize was won, in 1973, by a string quartet playing an arrangement of a slow air.

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<sup>46</sup>Held in Elgin Town Hall, 16th June, 1973.

The competitive fiddle festival is nowadays by its very nature socially and culturally exclusive of certain categories of fiddler, principally the unschooled and semi-schooled players, although the latter do sometimes enter, usually with little success. As I have said, the adopted criteria of repertoire and style tend to ~~mitigate~~<sup>militate</sup> against the unschooled fiddler, who would generally only feel confident enough to enter as a member of a fiddle band in the 'orchestral' competition. At the Perth BBC Competition (1969), "each contestant was required to play four groups of pieces, all differing in range and style,"<sup>48</sup> a stipulation with which few unschooled fiddlers could comply. The only exceptions to this type of competition would seem to be the festivals of traditional music held annually at Kinross (by the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland) and at Newcastle~~l~~ton, where unschooled and semi-schooled fiddlers can compete with some success. However, these are not typical, since they are both part of the folk-music 'revival' movement which consciously seeks to promote styles of playing which might be identified with the changing (or, perhaps, disappearing) culture of rural areas and which deliberately try to avoid many of the formalities of 'concert performance'. We find, too, that the social groups which support folk-revival festivals such as that at Kinross (including students and predominantly middle-class

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<sup>47</sup>See the programme of the Elgin Festival of Scots Fiddle Music, 1973, where these tunes are prescribed for the Juveniles (age 13 to 16) competition only.

<sup>48</sup>Sleeve note of BBC Record REB84M.

afficionados of 'traditional folk music' as a quite recent, revived interest) are broadly different from those which attend the competitive fiddle festivals. They tend to belong to an older age group, are lower middle class and generally contain a smaller proportion of students and other highly educated groups. It would be true to say that both types of audience contain a proportion of 'connoisseurs' and (perhaps the majority) a proportion of people whose knowledge of the finer points of style and technique is more limited, and who attend more out of a general preference for, and pleasure in, 'Scottish' music as opposed to pop music or 'classical' music. But for the connoisseurs especially (as well as the performers) the meaning (by which I mean the associations, historical or otherwise, which the musical performance in a given social situation may convey) may be slightly different in the two kinds of competitive gathering. The concept of meaning as perceived in fiddle competitions is one, however, which would require a detailed study of the competitions themselves, and is therefore beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### The Speyside Fiddler and Social Context

Most of my informants in Speyside no longer take an active part in communal musical activity. Partly this is because of age -- all of them are over fifty and two over eighty -- but the main reason is that such activities either no longer happen regularly or do not require fiddle music. Consequently, for almost all of my informants, playing the fiddle is now a private activity, maintained within the home for private enjoyment without an audience.

The pattern is a familiar one in rural Scotland -- the drift of population to the large towns, leading to a lapse of interest in

social dancing; the replacement of the fiddle by the accordion for traditional dance music; television as a substitute for participation in live musical activity. All these have contributed to the decline of interest (especially among the young) in the kind of social occasion in which the fiddler once took part. In that part of the Spey Valley which lies west of Grantown-on-Spey there is the additional attraction, for young people especially, of the Aviemore Ski Centre. There, musical entertainment, including 'folk' and rock music, is provided on a large scale (primarily for the tourists who stay at hotels in the centre, but these live shows attract local people from a wide area) and this means that village dances in nearby villages like Carrbridge have become less frequent. Indeed, even in Grantown, the tourist industry tends to ensure that most live entertainment is of a more commercial nature than might otherwise be thought necessary for a purely local audience. And, as if to confirm the movement to the cities, new fiddle bands have, in recent years, been founded in the two largest population centres within thirty miles of the valley -- Inverness and Elgin.

It would be useful at this point to give an account of the kinds of social activity involving fiddle music in Speyside during the last fifty years. These can be divided into three types:

- (a) Social Dancing, including village dances held in community halls or hotels; dances held in farm barns or kitchens, 'harvest homes' or 'kirns'; weddings;
- (b) Fiddle Bands, usually entitled 'Strathspey and Reel Society';
- (c) Competitions, or local competitive festivals held annually under the auspices of a Strathspey and

Reel Society. One might add, as a fourth category, concert performances -- programmes of Scots songs (traditional and, more commonly, music-hall) and instrumental music, perhaps including items played by a fiddler -- but these 'ceilidhs', as they are often inaccurately termed, ceased to be presented regularly after the First World War. In fact, such public performances, inasmuch as they concerned fiddle music, were sometimes presented by a Strathspey and Reel Society, though they would seem to have played rather a secondary role in its activities.

Most of my informants were active participants within one or more of these categories between the wars -- that is, in the 1920's and 30's, and some continued to play at dances (much less often) into the 1950's. John Grant travelled beyond the valley, on a few occasions since the Second World War, to fiddle competitions such as that of the National Mod, though as a listener rather than a competitor.

#### Social Dances, 1920-1940

Social dancing between the wars was still a fairly common community activity in the Spey Valley. The area under study, has, as we have seen, two main concentrations of population: at the southern end, Grantown-on-Spey with the villages of Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten, ~~Dulnain~~ Bridge and Aviemore (now redeveloped as a much larger tourist centre); at the northern end, Dufftown, with Aberlour and its associated hamlets. Tomintoul and Glenlivet should, culturally speaking, be associated more closely with Grantown. Both areas contain a variety of small village centres where Saturday dances and other, less frequent



dances, were held, each drawing people from farms and other villages within a five to ten mile radius.

A wide variety of musical resources were available for these dances, and informants' accounts of these occasions suggest that even during this period, the fiddle was beginning to succumb to the pressure from other more powerful instruments better suited to accompanying as many as two hundred dancers in a noisy community hall. Fred Reid, of Dufftown, who played at many village dances in that area says that two or even three fiddles were often not loud enough.<sup>49</sup>

I mind . . . my brither an I was ance playin at a picnic dance, up here in a hallie in Glen Rinnes . . . an 'twas on a Seterday night -- an I think the half o Dufftown was up in Glen Rinnes. An I mind we wis playin an eightsome reel an the bloody sweat wis rinnin off the wa' ye ken . . . an, eh . . . I turned roond . . . an . . . Johnny was stannin playin an I wis playin aside 'im on a chair. An I says till 'im, 'I canna hear fit y'ere daein, man,' I says, 'for noise, I canna hear ye'. An him stannin aside me, pittin a' the weight that he could! 'Oh,' I says, 'I've never seen naethin like this', I says, 'I'm nae gonna play again withoot a piana' . . . an he says, 'nor yet am I'. An that's why ma ither brither started off wi the trumpet, ye ken.

However, before the advent of the modern 'country dance band' (with its now standard line-up of one or two piano accordions, occasionally a fiddle, piano and drums) in the late 1930's, it would seem that almost any available instrument was likely to be pressed into service. Fred Reid played for some time in a band which he says played 'jazz music', though strictly speaking it did

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<sup>49</sup>SA 1973/142B.

not play jazz but popular songs and dances of the day, as well as some modern dances which were already going out of fashion in the cities, and traditional Scottish dances. This band included a saxophone and trumpet with fiddle, piano and drums. Clearly, the fiddle was already becoming redundant in such company and it was particularly difficult to arrange the music so that it could be heard: " . . . when ye wis playin a violin, ye'd tae play yer violin aye a . . . aye ye played it near an octave up abeen the piana. I used tae play quadrilles up here look . . . " (Fred Reid).

Fred Reid played concertina, too, at harvest homes rather than public dances, which were usually held in a barn or in a large farmhouse kitchen. In Tulloch the harvest home celebration was known as the 'cliack night', according to John Grant (the 'cliack' being the last sheaf of corn tied in the shape of a St. Andrew's Cross and hung inside the house for the rest of the year), and in his own house this tended to be less an occasion for dancing than for a ceilidh and exchanging of songs, stories and fiddle tunes.

### Payment

Payment for playing at dances varied from one area to another. John Grant was rarely paid for village-hall dances, whereas Fred Reid received 'fifteen bob' for a night(probably shared between him and other instrumentalists). John Grant was never paid for playing at weddings because it was normal for a musician to offer his services free to the bride and groom on such occasions; however, on more recent occasions when he was asked to play for dancing at a Nethy Bridge Hotel he was given three pounds for an evening. John Grant was also sometimes paid in kind for providing music at childrens'

dancing classes held by a local school teacher. The payment generally took the form of some article of clothing -- socks or a sweater. Other informants confirm that fiddlers in Speyside, until quite recently, have not regarded payment as very important and payment was in many situations exceptional. And at a wedding (for example) musicians were often plentiful, including pipers (in the Grantown area) and melodion players, so that fiddlers could not have the monopoly that would make them indispensable enough to command payment. In any case it would seem consistent with the position of most fiddlers within the social structure of the area that they would not seek payment at 'informal' dances such as those held at weddings. In a small parish like Tulloch such celebrations were essentially meetings of social equals -- small farmers and crofters -- and the fiddler, being one of these himself, was usually invited as a guest first and musician second.

### The Dances

Fiddlers were (and are) required to play much more than traditional Scottish country dances at both public and private functions. John Grant, for example, remembers the dances held in the barn on his croft when all the small farmers in the parish would attend and there would be two or three fiddlers, including his father, a neighbour Mr. Cameron (now dead) and 'old McQueen', another neighbouring farmer. The dances included threesome,<sup>50</sup> foursome and eightsome reels, "Strip the Willow," the "Flowers of

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<sup>50</sup> J.F. and T.M. Flett in "The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-form," Scottish Studies XVI/II, p. 107, suggest that the threesome reel as a social dance had virtually disappeared

Edinburgh," and "Petronella," but other non-Scottish dances popular at that time were also done -- including the "Lancers," quadrilles, and polkas. Strathspeys were, incidentally, often performed as 'schottisches'. These dances were held two or three times a year (during the period immediately before and after World War I) at times of specific celebration like Halloween and New Year on a kind of informal rota system, it being understood that every farmer would take his turn in offering his barn and hospitality. The practice seems to have stopped in the 1920's in Tulloch, however, probably because of a quickening in the rate of depopulation in the parish after the war.

Some of the older, non-Scottish square-dances faded in popularity after about 1920 and quadrilles must have been quite rare by the 1940's, though the "Lancers" was still danced at least until the end of the Second World War. Meanwhile, waltzes and 'quicksteps' became more and more popular, so that, along with polkas, they provided the main relief from the more energetic country dances. John Grant played waltzes almost exclusively on the few occasions when he was asked to play at a Nethy Bridge hotel in the year before my fieldwork (1972). His waltz repertoire consisted largely of well-known Gaelic and Scots ballads rendered in triple-time (see tape Example 10). In such a situation he was accompanied by a pianist, and, indeed, (as the sound example shows) he finds it difficult to play these metrically without an accompaniment.

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by the turn of the century, so its survival in Tulloch at least ten years later is remarkable. The version John Grant remembers in Tulloch, where the dancers carry handkerchiefs, is described as being very old and the use of handkerchiefs as 'of ancient origin' by Emerson in A Social History. . . , op. cit., p. 166.

Some fiddlers, like Fred Reid, were undoubtedly required, between the wars, to play a wide range of the newer popular dances of the time (what Mr. Reid called 'jazz music'), but this applies more to those fiddlers who played as a member of a dance-band of the kind I have already described above, and it is clear that the fiddler in that situation played a rather subordinate role, musically speaking.

Dancing-masters, quite common in the North of Scotland in the nineteenth century, played a vital role in the continuance of dance traditions in rural areas, and, indeed, were also the bearers of musical traditions since many of them were fiddlers. They did not last long into the present century and there can have been very few left when the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society was founded in 1923 to revive the waning interest in traditional dancing. Dancing masters were professional or semi-professional teachers, often itinerant, who held public classes in a given area, usually visiting a different village hall on each day of the week. They taught 'square' dances as well as Highland and country dances and their pupils included farm workers of both sexes as well as people of the middle classes.

One dancing master, John Lawson, who was well-known in Morayshire, continued his work in Strathspey (chiefly in the Grantown area) until about 1917. He was a fiddler who accompanied his pupils as he taught them, using his bow to punish mistakes.<sup>51</sup> As has often been remarked, traditional dancing was considered by rural

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<sup>51</sup>See SA 1973/142 for interview with Mr. and Mrs. P. Macdonald and Miss R. Cumming.

Scotsmen to be a skill which had to be seriously acquired (at least until the late nineteenth century) and the large number of dancing masters known to be operating during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is proof of that. It would seem, however, that the serious depopulation of most areas of Northern Scotland from the second quarter of the nineteenth century onward, and the consequent weakening of rural community life was paralleled in the lessening of interest in those forms of dance which were essentially of the group -- the Highland and country dances which were the dancing-masters' stock-in-trade. Predictably, there was a later correlative increase in the popularity of 'couple' dances (like the waltz) and 'circle' dances where dancers move in pairs round the room.

### The Fiddle Bands

The Strathspey and Reel Society has, since the end of the nineteenth century, been one of the chief forms of musical participation open to the Scottish fiddler -- schooled or unschooled. It is significant, indeed, that these associations of fiddlers began to spread at a time when, despite the efforts of the dwindling body of dancing-masters, the tradition of dancing specifically Scottish dances to Scots fiddle music was showing signs of disappearing. The fiddle band, in embryonic form, was not new -- as we have seen, two or three fiddles often played together (in unison) at village dances -- but a large group of twenty or more fiddles offered far more than could a dance-band to its members.

The Strathspey and Reel Society (which I shall call 'fiddle-band'), in fact, was part of the movement away from the concept of the fiddle as primarily a dance instrument, for it was essentially

an orchestra whose function was to provide fiddle-music for a listening audience. And, secondly, it provided fiddlers with an opportunity to play together in congenial surroundings at a regular practice. As in most amateur orchestras the second of these functions was, for many members, rather more important than the first. Most of these bands were founded with the express purpose of the preservation and furtherance of 'the art' of the fiddler (aims to which fiddle competitions are also frequently dedicated)- a sure sign that the tradition was felt to be 'dying'.

Fiddle bands still exist in cities such as Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and in some smaller towns like Elgin and Inverness. But only a few like those at Banchory in Kincardineshire and Kirriemuir in Angus survive in villages; many more folded up during the Second World War and were unable to continue after 1945. One of these was the Grantown-on-Spey Strathspey and Reel Society which drew its members from the town itself and the surrounding villages. Another, smaller, rival group ran for a few years between the Wars at Nethy Bridge, but seems to have little success in attracting members from the larger society in Grantown. The Grantown Society was founded in 1917 by a Colonel Smith, Factor of the Seafield Estate, with an initial membership of seven. This grew until, at its peak, it could muster between twenty and thirty fiddles and broadcast more than once from the Aberdeen transmitter of the BBC Scottish Home Service. However, membership began to decline in the late 1930's, and the Society was dissolved at the beginning of the War.

Almost all of my informants from the southern part of the

study area were members of this band -- indeed, there can have been few fiddlers within a radius of ten to fifteen miles of Grantown who were not. In an area where population is scattered, the fiddler tends to be known within a highly restricted community boundary whose limits do not extend very far beyond his own village and its immediate surroundings. The fiddle band offered contact with most other fiddlers in the larger area, however, and created a communal focal-point for musicians who belonged to an essentially individualistic tradition. As institutions, the bands were legally constituted and organised on the amateur orchestral society model, with committee and office-bearers, and a conductor. Indeed, their debt to the example of the 'classical' music society was such that, superficially, there is very little difference between a 'traditional' strathspey and reel society and an amateur orchestra apart from the repertoire itself-- and fiddle bands are frequently referred to as 'orchestras' at the competitive festivals which they themselves administer.<sup>52</sup>

The nature of the membership of such bands must pose considerable musical problems, perhaps less nowadays than fifty years ago when non-literate fiddlers were more common. In the case of the Grantown band, for example, there can have been very few restrictions on eligibility for membership other than a stipulation of some reasonable degree of competence on the fiddle; but kinds of competence varied widely from musically non-literate products of

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<sup>52</sup>See, for example, the programme of the "Annual Festival of Traditional Music of Scotland" held by the Angus Strathspey and Reel Society in 1973, where the fiddle band competition is described as being for 'orchestra' of 12 to 16 players.



a rich oral tradition like John Grant to schooled fiddlers -- and even to amateur violinists whose membership probably owed more to a lack of opportunities to participate in 'classical' music groups than to a great affinity for traditional fiddle music. And, as we can see from John Grant's account of the Grantown Society's practices (App. I, p.189): ". . . the lads that had no ear . . . they were pullin their bow -- I don't know whether they were playin or no!"

The members of the band read their parts from music, in the orchestral manner, and followed the beat of the conductor who was himself a fiddler or violinist ( a local bank manager at Grantown). An insistence on musical literacy is maintained in most, if not all, of the present day fiddle bands on the Scottish mainland, though clearly, standards of competence must be highly variable in this respect. In the Grantown band, John Grant and one or two others were unable to read music and had to rely on the conductor to 'play the tune over' a few times at the beginning when additions to the repertoire were being learned.

The role of the conductor was, then, very much that of a teacher at rehearsals, correcting melodic and rhythmic mistakes and (in slow airs especially) suggesting where to use elements of 'expression'. His most obvious function was, of course, to provide a 'beat', but the extent of his rhythmic discipline over a body of fiddlers of such differing styles cannot be speculated upon. Mr. Davidson, the Grantown conductor, was from all accounts a schooled fiddler who did not insist (and it is doubtful whether it would have been possible) on uniformity of bowing, but it is

impossible to say whether 'discipline' (of the orchestral kind) might have been considered more or less important then than it is now in fiddle bands. Certainly, if one compares the rhythmic discipline of the present Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society (where the conductor is a semi-schooled fiddler and 'orchestral' values such as playing exactly together are not stressed) and the Elgin Strathspey and Reel Society<sup>53</sup> (where the conductor is a violinist and an emphasis on corporate rhythmic discipline is clear), one might conclude that the style of a fiddle band as a whole is substantially dependant on the degree to which the conductor wishes, or is able, to regard his own role in 'orchestral' terms.

As I have said, the weekly rehearsal of the band was in itself a social occasion which ranked at least as high in importance in many members' eyes as the public concerts (which were, after all, infrequent -- only once or twice a year). The annual competitive festival was the single most important of the society's public promotions for many members, however, and the prestige attached to winning a prize must have been considerable. But as John Grant suggests, the status of membership of the society itself was a not inconsiderable attraction to some whom, he declares, "didn't care an old song whether they played or no" (App. I, p.189 ). One could speculate, again, about the reasons for this status: it could be, for example, that membership of such a society (a) was, in an unschooled fiddler's eyes a 'step up' nearer the 'high class' world of orchestral music (I have already in Chapter One, mentioned

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<sup>53</sup> See SA 1973/108 for performances by both groups.

the feeling of inferiority some fiddlers display); (b) allowed players of low competence (in technical terms) to play with others of higher competence; (c) allowed some players to move, in however limited a fashion, in social circles not normally open to them, e.g. a farm labourer being able to mix with teachers or bank managers.

The playing of the traditional dance repertoire in a quite different socio-musical setting -- the fiddle band -- presents interesting examples of how significant changes in use can affect elements of style and structure: firstly, the introduction of a harmonic instrument, the piano, as accompaniment to the band imposes a harmonic dimension on many tunes which had not previously embodied such a specific system within their structure.

This, of course, is a pervasive aspect of musical change in most branches of Scottish traditional music. Secondly, the length and repetition sequence of the dance-tune is altered through the tendency, in fiddle-bands, to perform tunes in mixed 'sets' of a march-strathspey-reel formula. This practice, inspired, perhaps, by competitions where the tune-'set' is mandatory, ignores the 'dance' aspect of the music entirely and treats it as 'listening' music. It also makes the tempo changes (which, in a dance set, exist only when a strathspey-reel sequence like the "Reel o Tulloch" is required) unusually important, and these are given a good deal of attention in fiddle band rehearsals.

Thirdly, the restrictions on most aspects of individual style imposed by playing en masse can cause changes in elements which are arguably structural, like tempo, which is generally slower in reels than one would expect from a solo player.

Thus, if a change in use can effect such significant changes in style and structure, one is prompted to ask whether the participant's perception of the music in these two circumstances is not also radically different. Clearly, he regards it as the same music, since he refers to it by the same name in each case, but is it really the same music? The problem of the nature of a musician's perception of the music he performs is related to that of musical 'meaning', and, indeed, of different levels of meaning -- whether ascribed through tradition or whether subconsciously within the mental and physical systems of the musician, or whether (possibly) 'inherent' in the music structure itself. The Scottish fiddle band, which partly because of the complex nature of the fiddle tradition, often consists of fiddlers (and violinists) of disparate social and (music) educational backgrounds, might provide interesting information on the ways in which dance music can have different 'meanings' within a single socio-musical situation. A detailed study of present day fiddle bands might show however, that the membership is more socially homogeneous than it would seem to have been in the Grantown band of John Grant's youth. Certainly, as the unschooled fiddler becomes less and less common and fiddle bands consist almost entirely of schooled fiddlers the result is likely to be stylistically more homogeneous -- a musical manifestation of an increasingly unified view of the tradition as a whole.

### The Competitions

Fiddle competitions, in common with most other socio-musical events involving fiddlers, are no longer held within the Strath-spey area. The nearest competition, at Elgin, attracts contestants

from other parts of the North East (notably Aberdeenshire, and especially the City of Aberdeen) but hardly any from Strathspey.

As we have seen, the Grantown Competition, run by the Strathspey and Reel Society between the Wars was a small-scale, local event in which unschooled fiddlers could do well -- John Grant, Alec Grant and John Ferguson were all prizewinners. But it is difficult now to ascertain the extent of its importance in the Strathspey fiddler's world between the Wars. John Ferguson's account (SA 1973/141B) suggests that there were usually at least twenty competitors for the championship competition, and John Grant maintains that "there was a lot o lads goin on there . . . they woulda been just as well in their bed . . . they didn't know what they were doin'." (App. I, p.189 ) It seems likely, then, that most members of the Strathspey and Reel Society were willing to try their luck in the competition regardless of whether they expected to win or not. The Grantown competition, unlike most of those of today, was primarily an unschooled fiddler's event, and as such provided a rare opportunity for the unschooled player to acquire considerable status among his peers. In that respect, therefore, it must be considered one of the more significant socio-musical events in the fiddler's year though in many ways it represented attitudes and criteria which were more a product of the world of the schooled than the unschooled fiddler.

Indeed, even in such a small-scale competition, contradictions between the schooled and unschooled views of 'correctness' in fiddle playing are evident. For example, foot-tapping (which might reasonably be considered an integral part of the performance of

many unschooled fiddlers) was forbidden by adjudicators: John Ferguson lost marks on account of this, and John Grant was told to tap his foot inside his boot. Foot-tapping is, in fact, essential to him -- he cannot play without it, and says that "anybody that plays, say, now, a player that's not just a great player, or maybe he hasn't got a good ear -- ye'll never see him tappin his fōot."

The rules of the competitions were, then, designed to discourage unschooled playing and to promote the Scottish fiddle tradition as a unified national tradition. The concept of a 'national music' (a term frequently used by Scott Skinner) with a national style (in fiddle terms) was particularly attractive in Victorian Scotland and it undoubtedly survives in fiddle bands and fiddle competitions. Surprisingly, this nationalistic tone did not manifest itself in a centralised national organisation for fiddle bands or competitive festivals as it did in Ireland,<sup>54</sup> but in Scotland the emphasis on the cultural value of a national tradition does not seem to have been allied to a strong political movement as it undoubtedly was in Ireland. Even the more recently formed Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland cannot compare in the extent of its activities with its Irish equivalent (founded in the 1940's) the Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to give an 'overview' of the Scottish fiddle tradition and to illustrate something of its diver-

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<sup>54</sup>The Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletics Association both performed this function in Ireland at the turn of the century.

sity and, indeed, of its fragmentation. A study of the evidence, both historical and current, based on the writings of others and the oral information gathered in interviews with informants, suggests that the concept of a unified Scottish fiddle tradition has, in the past, been an inaccurate one. It would be true to say that a greater degree of social and stylistic homogeneity is developing, and it can be said that this homogeneity will, in effect, carry the tradition away from certain sections of the whole community of traditional fiddlers. This evolution towards an entirely schooled tradition is, of course, a natural corollary of the spread of musical education, of the general improvements in the social-economic life of rural communities and the urban orientation of the traditional music revival. However, as we have seen, the main categories of socio-musical activity have come to be increasingly dominated by the schooled fiddler, and the category which formerly was largely the province of unschooled and semi-schooled fiddlers -- the social dance -- has come to be dominated by other instruments, notably the accordion. The unschooled fiddler, in any case a dwindling category, is therefore left outside the mainstream of the tradition to some extent.

In Part II I shall examine the style of 'unschooled fiddlers in the Spey Valley in order to illustrate more fully their conception of the constants and variables of fiddle playing. I shall also discuss in more detail the attitudes of schooled and unschooled fiddlers to aspects of style and technique.

## PART II - STYLE

## Introduction

'... there might be young players but, I mean, eh... they'll no come... they'll no come up tae the old lads... the old style o men.' (John Grant, App.1, p.201)

These remarks could be said, I think, to be almost universally applicable in music cultures - indeed one finds their variants in traditions other than the musical. This is the older man's lament for the 'old days', the days of his youth; and yet, in the present context it has a more specific underlying significance. It may be said that the practice of performing Scots dance music on the fiddle in a way which is identified, by performers and listeners, as 'traditional' is 'dying out' in Strathspey in the sense that young people have little or no interest in continuing the practice. However, the tradition in toto survives in the larger population areas near and within large towns and cities, and it is the young schooled fiddlers from these areas whom John Grant has heard on radio and television, whom he considers to be inferior to 'the old style o men'. His lament is for change, for change in style and perhaps in the world - where playing traditional fiddle music no longer has quite the same meaning it had in his youth.

Stylistic change in Scots fiddle music is not within the scope of this dissertation, and I am here concerned only with style as it exists among a number of unschooled fiddlers in Strathspey. In analysing in detail certain aspects of fiddle



style my intention is to discover something of the principles which govern the norms and variables of style and, equally important, to examine concepts of acceptability and unacceptability of style for these musicians. It is to be hoped that this analysis will provide a basis of information for future studies of traditional fiddle-playing in Scotland.

### The Concept of Style

Alan Lomax<sup>55</sup> summarises style thus:

'It is the critical focal point for the multiple calibrations that identify the member of a culture to himself and to his companions, and that pick out the familiar paths along which successful activity can proceed'.

The Harvard Dictionary<sup>56</sup> quotes Webster's definition:

"Distinctive or characteristic mode of presentation, construction or execution in any art."

Most definitions of style, it seems, relate more to the structure of a piece of music than to the manner of its performance, but Webster's definition provides a useful general description of style as I shall discuss it here. In terms of the fiddler, the 'mode of presentation... or execution' characteristic of my informants in Speyside will be my prime consideration, while 'construction' - which I take to refer to musical structure - will be discussed only when necessary to the analysis of the other two.

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<sup>55</sup> Alan Lomax, Folk Song Style and Culture (A.A.A.S., Washington, 1968), p. 12

<sup>56</sup> Willi Apel, ed., Harvard Dictionary of Music (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 714

Lomax's definition provides useful guidelines for the more specific aim of determining the nature of the essentials, the norms, as well as the variables of style in performance. It is the nature of some, at least, of the 'multiple calibrations' which form the 'critical focal point' of unschooled fiddle playing that will concern us here, as well as concepts of style from both schooled and unschooled players.

It will be necessary to discuss style as a combination of aspects, to approach it from several different angles. This identification of a single aspect of style, whether it be rhythmic or harmonic, is not an entirely satisfactory method, since it involves the separation of 'elements' of music which are in fact inseparable. Charles Seeger<sup>57</sup>, in a paper on the compositional process in music, has some interesting things to say about this approach. In particular, he stresses that:

'Rhythm, that is, successions of events in time, is as necessary a component of melody as sound, that is, successions of pitches.'

And he declares that ethnomusicologists have no business trying to separate these 'elements' for discussion. This may well be valid as far as analysis of music structure is concerned, but the various parameters of style in performance can only be examined separately, provided that the analyser is always aware of their interdependence.

I have adopted two very broad headings, Harmony and Rhythm,

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Seeger, On the Formational Apparatus of the Music Compositional Process, (in Ethnomusicology, Vol.XIII, No. 2, Middletown, 1969), p.234.

for this examination of fiddle style. The second of these requires little justification in the context of dance music. The first, however, is more problematic, since it presupposes the existence of a harmonic dimension in music which one might expect to be primarily 'melodic'. Harmony exists on two levels in the playing of Strathspey fiddlers: the first of these is immediately apparent in the use by some fiddlers of what have been rather inadequately termed 'drone ' effects, and in various kinds of 'double-stopping'. I shall discuss these systematically and attempt to discover whether a relationship (other than the physical) exists between them and melody - whether the fiddler has what might be termed a 'harmonic sense'.

Secondly I shall discuss the more elusive relationship between the harmonic and melodic aspects of fiddle-tune variants and the ways in which some variants, characteristic of a particular fiddler's style, appear to be 'harmonic paraphrases' reduced to the harmonic 'essentials' of the melody as it is commonly known.

This survey of style among Strathspey fiddlers is necessarily selective and I have preferred to give detailed analyses of only two of the many parameters rather than attempt to cover others equally complex, such as melodic ornamentation, less thoroughly.

Since performances are analysed more than once throughout Part II I have found it more convenient to place all of the longer transcriptions in Appendix 2 at the end. These are referred to in the text by Example Number, and this number cor-

responds to that of its recorded performance on Track B of the example tape.

## Chapter 3

## HARMONIC STYLE AND 'CHORDING'

The use of 'drone' effects in instrumental playing is found in many music cultures throughout the world, and the phenomenon has received considerable attention from musicologists. Edith Gerson-Kiwi, in her survey of middle-east drone styles<sup>58</sup>, suggests that, in Asiatic music,

'the bourdon (drone) acts as the indispensable regulator which maintains the identity of a specific melodic character, or mode, as opposed to the splitting forces of progressive ornamentation',

and further suggests that the drone gives the player a kind of 'psychological support', an anchor of security to which he can continually return during his improvisation. In fiddle playing, of course, the 'drone' effect obtained by striking with the bow the open string above or below that being stopped by the fingers cannot be continuous as it might be in eastern music, where a separate drone string is provided. However, the psychological force of a drone effect need not depend on its being continual, as Gerson-Kiwi later points out:

'in the Arabic countries, the bourdon style is further weakened and nearly ceases as an auditive factor, but not as a spiritual force'.

The idea of the drone as a kind of psychological 'crutch' is

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<sup>58</sup> Edith Gerson-Kiwi, Drone and Dyaphonia Basilica (Yearbook of the IFMC, 1972), p. 10

echoed by Douglas Kennedy in a footnote to Bayard's article<sup>59</sup> where he suggests that

'from a dancer's point of view, the "drone"... was functional - a dancer's "continuo". Bagpipes and slow-time tunes required the drone effect which produced the rhythmical warmth of feeling required by the dancers'.

This is a thesis which stands up rather better than the rather facile, but oft-quoted conception of the drone in European (and particularly Scottish and Scottish-influenced) fiddle playing as mere evidence of a bagpipe influence. Bayard himself states merely that some of his Pennsylvania informants think "drone-style" to be 'quite old' whereas Krassen<sup>60</sup>, discussing Appalachian fiddle style, subscribes to the bagpipe theory.

The practice of 'chording'<sup>61</sup> in Scottish fiddle-playing may well be due, in part, to bagpipe influence, particularly in areas where the bagpipe still maintains its popularity as a medium for dance music. Indeed, fiddlers in the North-West particularly, may consciously use a droning open string in imitation of the pipes, though this practice is largely confined to slow tunes. But drone-style 'chording' is found in some fiddle styles of Shetland where the bagpipe is not an indigenous instrument. Similarly it forms an important aspect of Norwegian hardanger fiddle style. It is more likely that 'chording' in Scottish

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<sup>59</sup> Bayard, Op. cit., p. 18

<sup>60</sup> Miles Krassen, Appalachian Fiddle, (New York, 1973) p. 17

<sup>61</sup> 'Chording' is a word used by John Grant to describe the practice of playing two strings together, the second unstopped.

fiddle playing has historical antecedents in the technique of older bowed instruments like the croud, and possibly also in harp-playing. The 'folk view' as I have found it in Speyside certainly makes no reference to the pipes. John Grant says that 'chording' a tune 'makes it sound better' (App. 1, p.194) and the general opinion among other informants is that it gives a fuller, more 'ringing' sound to the tune, an obvious asset when playing for dancing.

The functional aspect of open string 'chording' and its relationship to the psychological is, indeed, central to the problem. As we shall see later, the 'chording' technique can be used for rhythmic emphasis in dance music; it can also help to reinforce the carrying power of the fiddle in a crowded and noisy dance-hall. Further, the fiddler who has to play continuously for long periods during the dance may find 'chording' a good way of relieving the strain on the fingers of his left hand: in the older tunes, particularly, it may often be possible for the player to outline the essentials of the melody by relying extensively on open string harmonies. As I have suggested, the psychological strength that the harmonic dimension, in the form of a 'drone', provides for both player and dancer should not be underestimated - and, clearly, one is drawn to the conclusion that this aspect of style may only be fully examined in terms of the dance situation.

As to the incidence of this aspect of style among traditional fiddlers in Scotland, it must be reiterated that there is no strong evidence to identify it with any one area. Some fiddlers

themselves tend to identify it more with West Highland style than with that of the North East, and this may have some relationship to the bagpipe theory since the influence of that instrument could be said to be considerably stronger in the West. However, while several Strathspey fiddlers 'chord' their tunes in varying degrees the practice is also found among Aberdeenshire fiddlers, though possibly to a lesser extent.

Rather the evidence suggests that 'chording' is most likely to be related to the music-educational and social background of the fiddler. We may say that those fiddlers who use open-string chordings most are likely to be (a) unschooled and (b) experienced in playing for dances and of rural working-class stock. This is not to explain why chording exists, but merely to point out where it is most likely to be found. The unschooled fiddler, lacking respect for the authority of the printed text (where 'chording' does not exist) and for the sanction of teachers who may well regard apparently indiscriminate use of 'chording' as wrong, is stylistically more accountable to his own social group, where the criteria of good fiddle playing are different.

Fiddlers, like John Grant, who use chording technique throughout their repertoire (except, perhaps, in slow tunes) may often tend to use it more extensively in the older dance tunes than in more recent compositions by composers like Skinner. Clearly, most of the older tunes (especially those dating from earlier than the mid-eighteenth century) are harmonically and melodically simpler. A large number, of which The Reel o Tulloch and



The Smith's a Gallant Fireman are typical, are hexatonic and based on the classic harmonic-melodic pattern of two triads a tone apart (the tonic and flattened leading-note triads), and these lend themselves to free use of open strings - especially as they are usually played in the keys of A or D. The more recent compositions, however, are often harmonically more complex and melodically of wider compass, making chording much more difficult.

The Smith's a Gallant Fireman is typical of the older traditional tunes in tonal organisation. It is also one of the most popular and frequently played strathspeys among Speyside fiddlers. The melody follows a familiar pattern in which the first half of the four-bar line centres on the (tonic) D major triad with the second half centreing on E minor, returning to D in the fourth bar.

John Grant's performance (Ex. 2) uses open fifths extensively. In this, it is typical of all his strathspey, reel and march playing. As he himself says:

'... it sounds better. If no you would jist play, on the one... note. I'm bad for puttin' in that thing...'  
(App. 1, p.194)

Clearly, the 'chording' revealed by descriptive transcription is, with a few minor exceptions, deliberate. The major inadequacy, however, of such transcriptions, is their inability to convey any indication of the physical, motor-process involved in the performance - something which is important to the nature of fiddle style and to this discussion of harmonic style. Indeed, the question which poses itself here is: does the fiddler use 'chords' whenever physically possible in a more or less haphazard manner,

or is there some evidence of harmonic discrimination which has a musical rather than a physical basis?

It is extremely difficult to arrive at any conclusive answer, since the individual requirements for successful performance vary so much, not only from tune to tune but also from fiddler to fiddler. Analysis of Example 2 shows that chording is used less where the harmonic basis shifts from the tonic triad. Thus in bar 3 and again in the first three measures of bar 8, the melodic link moves into the E minor triadic shape so that open fifths are not possible. The alternative 'drone' string - 'G' - is, however, only lightly touched in the second beat of bar 3 and not used at all in bar 8. The same thing happens in the first half of bar 12 (where a possible 'A' drone is omitted) and again in bar 16.

If we compare a performance of the same tune by John Lindsay of Tomintoul (Ex. 14) we find that, on the whole, there is a similar tendency to use open chording on the 'home ground' of the tonic rather than in those bars where the harmonic emphasis changes. Comparison is slightly complicated here by the fact that John Lindsay's version differs melodically at one or two significant points (in bar 4, for example). However, although at the beginning of bar 3 Mr. Lindsay uses the open 'G' in the same way as John Grant, in the first three beats of bar 8 and the whole of bar 12 he uses 'single' notes only. The third version of Smith's a Gallant Fireman (ex. 21) played by Charlie Bremner of Glenlivet, reveals a rather different playing style, with 'chords' employed very sparingly. All four of these are

'tonic', using open 'D' and 'A' strings. This would seem to point to the possibility of some conscious preference for strengthening the tonic by open string chording on the part of the fiddler. There is no reason why, in bars 12 and 16 of his version, John Grant should be unable to use the nearest open string as he does throughout the performance. However, it would be unwise to base a 'harmonic' theory on performances of a single tune.

In fact, other performances by John Grant give a somewhat inconclusive picture. In Maggie Cameron, for example (Ex. 5) he tends to chord the tune as much as possible, so that almost the only points where he 'singles' the notes are those which involve crossing strings - making chording virtually impossible. The same could be said of his performances of Craigellachie Bridge (Ex. 4) and of the Brig o Perth (Ex. 3).

On balance then, it would be safer to assume that those fiddlers who 'chord' tunes consistently probably do so with no particular regard to harmonic progression. It happens that most traditional fiddle tunes (especially those which have their origins in fiddle rather than pipe technique) are constructed in such a way that open string chording will generally be most possible around a tonic harmonic base and will therefore tend to reinforce the tonic. The frequency of chording within a performance must depend to some extent on bowing technique as well as on the fingerings used.

It should be stressed that fiddlers normally 'chord' the tune at exactly the same places in every performance. Examining

ation of repeat recordings of performances by John Grant show that he is remarkably consistent in this respect. Certainly the stability of this aspect of style would suggest that it is closely bound by motor-processes - at least after the initial, more fluid, learning period. Further research is necessary to discover how much the fiddler's aesthetic discrimination between what is or is not acceptable is conditioned by the physical aspect of his playing (if, indeed, the two are at all separable).

In John Grant's playing, we find that full use is made of the possibilities of 'chording' in open fifths - to the extent that the melodic outline of the piece may become partly 'buried' within a harmonic structure. I shall discuss the influence of harmonic styles of playing on melodic lines in greater detail later, but for the present it would be useful to note the practical effect such chording may have on the performance and the uses it could have in, for example, the dance situation.

It will be obvious from an examination of three typical examples of John Grant's playing - The Smith's a Gallant Fireman, The Brig o Perth and The Reel o Tulloch (Exs. 2, 3 and 6) that the melodic-harmonic structure of these tunes allows (indeed, encourages) the performer to use 'chords' to give added rhythmic emphasis to certain parts of the tune which would be particularly effective in the dance situation. It would be wrong to assume that the fiddler makes a conscious decision to do this. However, it can be established by comparison with the early recording of Mr. Grant's playing, made when he was still performing regularly at dances, that the recent recordings are stylistically

almost identical. One can therefore conclude that rhythmic features of his playing may be related to the requirements of dance-playing.

Obviously the fact that, in all three of the examples mentioned above, the opening bar can be played almost entirely in open fifths, must contribute greatly to the establishment of a strong rhythmic pulse: 'chording' will increase the volume, the 'ringing' quality of the opening measure, and will help to reinforce rhythmic definition. But perhaps more interesting is the use of 'chords' to provide a rhythmically strong upbeat and the possibility of a functional role for these related to the dance.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this use of 'chording' in John Grant's playing occurs in his performances of Jigs. As the transcription of Jig of Slurs shows (Ex. 8) an open string chord using a deliberate downbow occurs at crucial points in the tune - namely, the end of each eight bar phrase (see bars 8, 16 and 24). The effect is to give heightened importance to the upbeat at these points and results in a kind of syncopation over the bar. It happens that by bowing the whole tune 'singly' (i.e. a separate bow for each note) the player arrives naturally on a downbow where it is required. John Grant played jigs regularly for dancing (including Jig of Slurs) - and normally the dance would be the 'Lancers'. It is not unlikely that his practice of accenting the upbeat at the end of each eight bar section was related to some 'turn' or change of partner in the dance. His own comments are typical:

'that's what gives it good lilt' and, later:  
'that's the way ye should play jigs'.

It might almost be said to be a 'universal' that the most effective way of bringing attention to a downbeat is to accent the up-beat immediately preceding it, and certainly in many forms of Scottish dance the preparation for a change of step or formation will naturally occur in anticipation of the beginning of a new section. One can only speculate as to whether this feature of Mr. Grant's playing arose directly out of necessity in playing at dances, whether he learned it from the playing of his father (who, he says, was fond of jigs) or some other player, or whether it is a personal idiosyncrasy - since he himself cannot remember when he started to play the tune in this way. Perhaps the key lies in the first of the remarks quoted above. The term lilt - common among Speyside fiddlers - obviously has a clearly defined meaning for Mr. Grant and other fiddlers, though it is not necessarily something whose precise meaning they can articulate. It concerns rhythm, tempo and what might, rather inadequately, be termed accent - a combination of natural feeling for the direction of a phrase and an ability to stress that feeling in various ways. I shall discuss the concept of lilt more fully in Chapter 7. But in the present case it is enough to regard John Grant's use of the term as an indication that his use of chording here has a primarily rhythmic function. In the same example, it is noticeable that chords are otherwise used only occasionally (for example on the first beat of bars 1, 2 and 5) and again serve the rhythmic purpose of accentuation of the downbeat.

John Grant suggests that his jig style is the traditional one. Unfortunately, none of the other informants in Speyside play jigs regularly, so that it would be difficult to substantiate his claim, but Breathnach<sup>62</sup>, discussing Irish jig style, stresses the importance to the idiom of 'linking notes' which connect one phrase to the next:

'Usually this function is performed by the last note of the group, which is thrown forward with a degree of emphasis to the succeeding group. This forward thrust is such a characteristic of the music that a traditional player not familiar with musical notation will, if asked to call the notes of a tune, invariably attach the linking note to the group it introduces rather than to that to which it belongs grammatically.'

It would seem that the upbeat 'chord' in John Grant's jig playing acts in very much the same way as the Irish 'linking-notes', providing the same degree of 'forward thrust'. But is 'chord-ing' used for a similar function in strathspey and reel playing?

Returning to Mr. Grant's version of Smith's a Gallant Fireman (Ex. 2) one is again confronted with the problem posed by the extensive use of chords throughout the piece, and it becomes difficult to discriminate between those chords used for a particularly rhythmic effect and those which are not. The final crotchet beat of bar 8 is strongly accented by the use of an open fifth chord played with an up-bow, leading into the second half of the tune, and the same happens at the end of bar 12. Both of these points (especially the first) signal important

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<sup>62</sup> Breandán Breathnach, Folk Music and Dances of Ireland, (Talbot Press, Dublin, 1971), p. 93

changes of movement in the dance and both are chorded with added strength in John Grant's performance. In John Lindsay's version of the same tune he does play open fifths at the same points, but they are played as detached quavers without the forward thrust into the succeeding bar that we find in John Grant's playing. Indeed, one might say that John Lindsay's performance style shows evidence of considerably smaller experience as a dancer than that of John Grant.

(Ex. 3)

Another of John Grant's strathspeys, The Brig o Perth,<sup>63</sup> shows further the usefulness of chording in accenting important upbeats and thereby contributing to the rhythmic structure of the performance. The final quaver of bar 2 (in the same way as the examples we saw in the Jig o Slurs) actually anticipates the beginning of the next bar with a down-bow syncopation tied across the bar-line.

Clearly, one must avoid a tendency, in making detailed analysis of a transcription, to forget the speed at which events happen, even in strathspey performances. Features such as those I have described above may appear fleetingly and often with less prominence than they appear to have on paper. It is one of the inherent faults of any descriptive transcription that print overstates the definition and lacks the flexibility of live performance. However, we may say that the evidence for a fiddler's use of chording as a means of rhythmic emphasis related to the requirements of dance is strong. Krassen<sup>63</sup> goes further and re-

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<sup>63</sup> Krassen, op. cit., p. 17



commends to Appalachian fiddlers the use of 'double-noting' (as he calls it) as a means of embellishing the performance of a tune as well as a way of adding 'emphasis'. Indeed, he asks novice fiddlers to learn to distinguish between acceptable and 'discordant' (i.e. unacceptable) chordings.

The idea of chording as embellishment is not one that I have found to be held by unschooled fiddlers in Strathspey, although when a fiddler says that 'it makes the tune sound better' the definition of embellishment as a conscious addition may be close enough to what he is doing. But Krassen's 'double-noting' style includes double-stopping (where neither string is open), and this is a technique which is not usually found among unschooled fiddlers in Scotland. Bayard<sup>64</sup>, too, confirms one's impression that true double-stopping is not the prerogative of the schooled fiddler in some parts of America.

Schooled fiddlers in Scotland generally find double-stopping within their technical capabilities, and it has been part of their style since the early 19th Century. The influence of violin technique, moreover, led late 19th Century schooled fiddlers like Scott Skinner to use double-stopping effects even more extensively as harmonic 'embellishments' of slow strathspeys and slow airs, as in this cadence figure from Skinner's arrangement of The Braes o Auchtertyre<sup>65</sup>:

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<sup>64</sup> Bayard, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Scott Skinner, The Scottish Violinist, (Bayley and Ferguson, London and Glasgow, 190?), p. 37

fig. 3



Such examples of 'double-stopping' as may appear in detailed transcriptions of performances recorded in Strathspey are invariably accidental, caused by the inadvertent stopping of two strings with one finger. It can also be the consequence of physical expediency: in Maggie Cameron (Ex. 5), John Grant 'double-stops' C# and high A in the second crotchet beats of bars 9, 10 and 11. But, since the C# has to be fingered as a melody note in the succeeding bar, the fiddler is merely setting his third finger in position on the A string in advance and thereby avoiding unnecessary finger movement.

We are thus brought, by this small evidence from the 'surface structure' of performance, to consider the physical realities of fiddle style - for, while the schooled fiddler has been provided with a violinistic technique which allows him to accomplish more than is required by the more restricted compass of the older part of his repertoire, the unschooled fiddler's technique is still rooted to the requirements of that music and to what is most comfortable for its performance. Technique, style and repertoire are inseparable in the playing of the unschooled fiddler, each growing out of the other (as we saw in Chapter 1, learning is synonymous with practising) and we may say that, for fiddlers like John Grant, much of the 19th Century fiddle music belongs to a different technique and (by definition) a different style.

We shall not understand the 'deep structure' of his style, however, until we know more about the physical dimension of fiddle-playing and its relationship to the socially determined criteria of acceptability that govern its surface pattern.

## Chapter 4

## HARMONY AND MELODY

As we have seen in Chapter 3, a harmonic style of fiddle-playing can be discussed purely in terms of the fiddler's use of the harmonic possibilities of his instrument for various reasons - whether for greater volume, rhythmic emphasis, or even 'psychological support'. But if we examine performances by fiddlers who play in this way and compare them with performances by those who do not, or with published versions, we find that their harmonic style in fact presupposes a distinctive melodic style. Distinctions between 'melody notes' (those pitches which are essential to performers' and listeners' identification of the tune) and the extra 'ringing' open-string notes (chordings) discussed in Chapter 3 become blurred and the possibility of alternative melody notes, variables, tends to reinforce the close relationship of the harmonic (vertical) and melodic (horizontal) dimensions of the tune-variant. Because of this inter-relationship I shall use the term harmonic-melodic to describe this aspect of style.

The theory that dance tunes published in the early 18th Century (when the first collections of traditional fiddle music were compiled) are, in fact, transcriptions (however inadequate) of variants current in performance practice of the time is a plausible one. However, the skeletal nature of these published

versions must also represent a selective view of fiddle-style and such stylistic elements as the harmonic are completely excluded, while we may assume that editorial 'improvements' in the shape of added passing notes and the like crept in in many cases.

The impact of printed music upon the tradition as a whole has already been mentioned, and its influence on oral tradition itself must be obvious. Its role in oral tradition is to 'solidify' a single variant (or set of variants, for tune-variants are not standardised even in published collections) into a melodic point of reference for those literate fiddlers who have access to it. At the same time, non-literate fiddlers may themselves learn, through oral tradition, a variant whose ultimate source was literary. Over a long period the effect of widespread dissemination of a published prescriptive transcription of a given tune is to make it the focal point of variants and to limit the melodic structure of those variants by being specific. In the case of many of the older traditional dance tunes whose melodic structure may have been difficult to isolate in the playing of a harmonic-style fiddler, the act of transcribing them for publication may have required a melodic structure more specific in detail than was in fact normally played. Two simple examples can illustrate this:

fig. 4



The first of these, bars one and two of The Reel o Tulloch, is taken from a popular published version of the tune in Kerr's Merry Melodies, volume 1 (see bibliography). The second is the beginning of John Grant's version of the same tune (Example 6).

Kerr's version is clearly more melodically specific, in its use of passing notes and in its detailed treatment of the A major triad in bar one. John Grant makes maximum use of the availability of two open strings in bar one, producing a more ambiguous melodic structure (and incidentally coming nearer to the usual bagpipe variants of this tune). The Kerr version is similar to all published versions since the early collections, and we may ask whether John Grant's variant might be more like those actually played by unschooled fiddlers of the 18th Century. If that was the case, we may imagine the 18th Century collector's difficulty in rendering such a performance into print. The filling-in of passing notes and the omission of the harmonic-melodic ambiguity of the piece, a vocal rather than an instrumental view of it, is understandable in the circumstances. In any case, the published version and similar variants are those nowadays played by schooled fiddlers (see Example 16, Hector McAndrew) and also by many unschooled players. John Grant's Reel o Tulloch is typical of the older tunes in his repertoire in its remarkable lack of melodic detail. In this chapter I want to review some of the questions raised by this harmonic-melodic style, some of the possible ways in which such tune-variants may come about and some of the possible norms and variables involved in the 'personalisation' of a tune.

The theory of 'harmonic equivalents' is one that has been used in the study of, for example, African musics to attempt to shed light on the 'deep structure' of melodic variants in polyphonic music. Briefly, it can be posited that, in some cultures there exists a supra-melodic 'harmonic spectrum' within which certain notes of a given 'melody' have a possible alternative or range of alternatives. These alternatives are socially acceptable as equivalents, it being possible to substitute one for another at will without the surface structure of the music being perceived as different in any significant sense.

We may adapt this theory in the context of harmonic-melodic fiddle style in examining a typical strathspey from John Grant's repertoire - Maggie Cameron (Ex. 5 )



Figure 5 represents a possible harmonic spectrum of the first two bars of Maggie Cameron. The larger notes give John Grant's melody line as far as it can be deduced from his extremely 'harmonic' performance of it, and the small notes represent possible alternatives or equivalents which could be played without rendering the tune unrecognisable as Maggie Cameron. The variables in this tune occur on those beats (all but the first and last in figure 5) which are based on the A major triadic form, A,  $C_{11}^{\sharp}$ , E. The first is invariable because it is always preceded by a downward moving anacrusis  $F_{11}^{\sharp}$ . Every other note in the first two bars has the possible alternative of E, and it is possible to imagine

a fiddler with an intensely harmonic style like John Grant playing E-A open fifths on these beats.

If we examine the variant from which John Grant claims to have learned the tune, that of Scott Skinner (published in The Harp and Claymore collection) we can see that it is melodically more specific:

fig. 6



The rocking triadic figure is avoided by John Grant (except in the second bar, and even there he only plays it at the repeat, the first time playing continuous E's) as being too specific for his style. He chooses harmonic equivalents which allow a more vigorous bowing with more use of 'chordings' and consequently a fuller sound.

And if we compare his performance with that of Jimmy Ross (Ex. 13) which is again more specific in the manner one would expect of a schooled fiddler it is possible to view John Grant's variant as a kind of 'paraphrase', reducing the melody to its essentials or norms. We may only speculate as to whether a harmonic spectrum in such tunes really does figure in the way a fiddler 'personalises' it during the learning process but John Grant's harmonic-melodic style certainly makes it a possibility worth considering. It may be necessary to ask whether the 'rules'



which govern the fiddler's choice of variables are, indeed, consciously or subconsciously aesthetic or whether they are locked in the muscular reflexes of his fingers and arm. In any case the deep structure of a performance would include these aspects, as well as the innumerable other factors social and biological which influence the surface structure.

What is it that makes a tune variant acceptable to a fiddler whose own version of it is different? What are the essential elements, the norms, that are necessary to a tune-variant's identification?

In order to explore possible answers to these questions we can examine another characteristic performance of John Grant's, that of the strathspey The Brig o Perth (Ex. 3a). It is perhaps one of the best examples of his harmonic-melodic style and another example of his paraphrasing of what appear to be the bare essentials of the melody. If we examine a possible harmonic spectrum<sup>66</sup> of the first two bars of this tune (fig. 7) it will be seen that

fig. 7




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<sup>66</sup> Harmonic spectrum based on three different variants discussed below, with the melodic element of John Grant's performance in large notes.

superficially the melodic structure is not unlike that of Maggie Cameron and, referring specifically to the first half of each tune, it will be seen that both are built on the classic A-G harmonic sequence. The crucial melodic feature which differentiates the first from the second is the occurrence of the high A in the third crotchet beat of bar 2. All of the printed sources have this A, invariably followed by a descending triadic formation of E and C<sup>♯</sup> (which is, of course, echoed in sequence in the G major bar 4). It is the placing of this motive which characterises the harmonic-melodic structure of the tune and which assists the player (and listener) in identifying the melody. A secondary motivic feature which is similarly functional (though it appears only in certain variants) is the final crotchet beat of bar 1. This occurs in John Grant's version though not in many of the printed sources, so that one must consider it rather less significant than the high A in the melodic structure. I deliberately stress the first strain in the tune-variant since it is in the first four, in some cases in the first two, bars that the 'identity' of the tune must be established.

Superficially, then, John Grant's performance of The Brig o Perth presents only the minimum of essential characteristics of the tune in these first few bars. In fact he does (on beat 1 of bar 1, and beats 1 and 3 of bar 2, for example) finger C<sup>♯</sup>s enough to sketch a few more elements of what might be termed the melody; but on several beats he is content to play open string fifths without any apparent 'melodic' function. If we

compare the relevant portions of three other versions<sup>67</sup> of this tune (fig. 8) it becomes obvious that this tune is in any case a fluid one by the very nature of its melodic structure:



Nonetheless, one might say that there is enough of a consensus between these three variants to provide a model of what most fiddlers would today understand the tune to be (fig. 9).



In particular, such a model contains, in beat 4 of bar 1 and the first four beats of bar 2, a melodic motivic shape which specifically identifies the tune. As I have said, John Grant presents the 'essentials' of this motivic shape sufficiently clearly for the tune to be identifiable, but on other beats plays open fifths with some purely melodic E's and C's to complete his 'sketch' of the tune. In fact, one can see from the full transcription that he prefers, in the A-centred bars of the tune, to

<sup>67</sup> (a) is from Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies, p.20  
 (b) is from Lowe's Collection, 1844  
 (c) is transcribed from a recording by an unschooled fiddler, Charles McIntyre of Mull, SA 1967/51

reduce its characteristic 'rocking' over the A-C<sup>II</sup>-E triad to either a repetition of the open A-E fifth (bar 1) or a 'rocking' over the open A and E without the C (as in bar 5). Obviously this is only possible in the A-centred bars and obviously, too, it represents an 'easy' solution to performance of the tune. But in any examination of variants - and in the present case one is dealing really with problems concerning the very nature of variants and how they come into being - one cannot discount the preference of performers for 'easy solutions' as mere laziness; that would represent the reaction of one who is used to regarding the printed representation of music as its only 'correct' source. It would be more appropriate to see physical expediency here as an important and natural part of the performance. That the 'easier solution' is only adopted when the musical structure allows and is limited by the necessity to provide what I have called the essentials of the tune is also evident from the transcriptions.

In the Reel o Tulloch, (Ex. 6) a tune which was probably originally played on the pipes (though it has been part of the fiddle repertoire at least since the early 18th Century and no doubt earlier) John Grant plays a version which is perhaps more completely 'harmonic' than any other in his repertoire. In fact his variant is much closer to the version usually played today by pipers<sup>68</sup> than Charles Milne's (Ex. 15) which is nearer

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<sup>68</sup> See Pipe-Major Ross's Collection of Highland Bagpipe Music, Bk. 5, London, 1950

most of the printed fiddle sources. It is, of course, possible that John Grant's version of this tune was learned from a piper, or at least influenced by it - but much more likely that it represents a traditional fiddle variant current in Tulloch in his youth and played by his father and other local fiddlers, and that this version happens to be closer to the pipe setting than is usual among, for example, Aberdeenshire fiddlers. In fact, the second 'turning' of John Grant's version (bar 5) and the second half (bar 9) would seem to show direct influence (melodically speaking) from the pipe settings. In this tune, however, despite its strongly 'A'-centred 'harmonic' character, one cannot say that the fiddler is 'selecting' the bare essentials from the tune's harmonic spectrum since it is in any case such a simple, almost non-melodic tune - with an extremely limited set of melodic/harmonic variables. Some degree of melodic-harmonic modification may occur, this time most likely for physical expediency, on the second crotchet beat of bar 1, where, as a substitute for the usual 'rocking' figure E, C<sup>♯</sup>, A, John Grant plays E, A, A, obviating the need to use the third finger at that point.

It may be that, in fast moving music, such as the reel, the fiddler is less likely to 'paraphrase' the tune since the variables are fewer. Certainly, in older reel tunes like The Reel o Tulloch, the melodic structure is if anything even more restricted to the three notes of the 'A' major triad (alternating with the corresponding notes of the 'G' triad) than the strathspeys I have discussed. Nevertheless, John Grant's version of this reel is entirely consistent with the harmonic style of

other tunes in his repertoire. It is, first of all, obviously not learned from a printed source or even from a fiddler who learned it from such a source and though, as I have said, it could have been learned from a piper's performance (since it resembles the standard pipe variants reasonably closely) its wide popularity among the Tulloch fiddlers he knew in his youth makes that seem improbable.

Finally, to refer to John Grant's Smith's a Gallant Fireman (Ex. 2), we can see the 'harmonic paraphrase' process working quite obviously in the first two bars where repeated open-string fifths are substituted for parts of the melodic motive D-F<sup>11</sup>-A in much the same way as in The Brig o Perth. John Lindsay's version (Ex. 14) is more explicit in its presentation of the melodic outline of the tune, though he uses open string fifths as frequently as Mr. Grant; but at one point, in bar 5, he does, apparently deliberately, repeat the E-A open fifth where he had previously, in bar 1, used the customary F<sup>11</sup> melody note. Again this is a small point and may not be of any great significance, but it does show that, for players who do make extensive use of the possibilities of open string 'chording', the option of paraphrasing the tune is there.

Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, in a discussion of Shetland fiddle styles<sup>69</sup> remarks that, in some areas, there is...

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<sup>69</sup> P. Shuldham-Shaw, Folk Music and Dance in Shetland, (Journal of EFDSS, London, vol.V, No. 3, 1948)

'... so much playing across the strings that it is difficult to distinguish the tune, and the instrument becomes harmonic and rhythmic rather than melodic'...

The examples I have cited above go some way in suggesting that the same could be said of the 'harmonic' style of playing in Speyside. I think that Shuldham-Shaw goes rather too far to suggest that 'the instrument becomes harmonic and rhythmic rather than melodic', if by that he means that the melodic aspect of the performance is substantially sublimated; but certainly the examples I have examined do tend to suggest a flexibility in melody which pushes the 'harmonic' (and rhythmic) side of the performance into greater prominence.

This leads me to the first of two conclusions which arise out of the evidence of the above examples:

(1)... that, in a harmonic-melodic style of playing, the purely melodic aspect of the tune is not necessarily of exclusive importance; that melodic detail may be altered or omitted by this harmonic approach; that it is often enough for the player to present what would seem to be the melodic 'essentials' of the tune and that these essentials are identified by their structural importance to the character of the tune, whereas certain other melodic elements are not 'essential' and consist of variables which may be paraphrased in accordance with a harmonic spectrum.

(2)... that the greatest possibility for harmonic paraphrasing of this kind occurs in those passages which are centred round the open-string fifth of that triad - i.e. A - E in the key of A and D - A in the key of D.

We may further ask: what is 'possible' in a harmonic-melodic play-

ing style, and why is such a style apparently relatively uncommon now, even among unschooled fiddlers?

I have discussed the first of these questions in terms of a 'harmonic spectrum'. That such a system of variables must inevitably be limited to one or two alternatives to each note is not difficult to establish and, generally speaking, the most likely (as well as possible) variables are found in passages centred round the 'rocking' triadic/melodic motive of the A-C~~♯~~-E-C~~♯~~-A type which is found in so many Scots fiddle tunes. What is possible is, it would seem, almost any melodic combination of the notes of the triad provided that, as in the case of strathspeys particularly, they form a shape which is capable of providing the necessary amount of rhythmic impetus. I must reiterate the point, however, that, in using the term 'variable', I do not wish to imply any notable degree of improvisation in performance. The variables are confined to the learning process, beginning with the initial transmission of the tune and continuing over a period until the tune has become 'solidified' into the variant peculiar to a particular player. It is entirely possible that these variables may alter in a performance executed in, for example, a dance situation, but in the present study such a conclusion would have to be purely speculative. On the evidence of repeated recordings of a musician playing the same tune one can only say that the findings of Linda Burman<sup>70</sup> concerning the prac-

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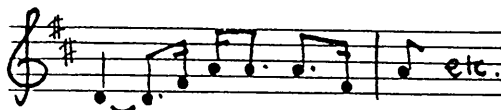
<sup>70</sup> Linda Burman, The Technique of Variation in an American Fiddle Tune, (Ethnomusicology XII/I, pp. 49-71, Middletown, 1968)



tice of deliberately improvised variation in some American fiddle styles do not seem to apply to the playing of any of my Speyside informants, and there is no Scottish parallel with the Irish technique of fiddle improvisation.

It is interesting, also, to note that there can be something of a dichotomy between a fiddler's 'mental picture' of a tune as he might sing it when asked to, and the same fiddler's performance on the fiddle. Thus John Grant would not sing the first bar of The Smith's a Gallant Fireman (Ex. 2) as he plays it. He would almost certainly add the usual F# thus:

fig. 10



And similarly at other points in tune-variants where he uses a reiterated open-string fifth instead of the usual triadic motive (as at the beginning of *The Brig o Perth*). The act of externalising the tune, of performing it instrumentally rather than vocally, produces a slightly different melodic result, but the difference involves only small changes in the selection of harmonic variables within the triadic set.

A willingness on the part of the fiddler to accept the melodic variants of other players may also suggest a degree of flexibility in the 'rules' of harmonic-melodic style. Most unschooled Strathspey fiddlers will readily accept performances which are quite different from their own not only in perform-

ance style, but also in melodic structure. Thus John Grant considered Hector McAndrew's version of The Reel o Tulloch, which is much more specific than his own (see Ex. 16), as perfectly acceptable (except in tempo, where variables are perhaps fewer). Partly this tolerance springs from social reasons - the reverence of unschooled fiddlers for schooled - but I suspect he would be equally tolerant of other variants from unschooled fiddlers. However the number of harmonic-melodic variables may decline (and with it the degree of tolerance of variants) where the tune itself is more specific in melodic structure, as in the case of many more modern tunes.

The second of my two questions brings us back to the socially determined basis of style. Only a few of my group of informants from the Spey Valley play with an extensively harmonic-melodic style. Of these, John Grant is the most harmonic while John Lindsay and Alex Grant are slightly less so. Of these three, Alex Grant is musically literate and to a small extent schooled in that he had a few violin lessons in his teens (probably after he had begun to play seriously). Alex Grant, however, undoubtedly learned a good deal of his repertoire before learning to read music. Most of the others, though semi-schooled or unschooled, have a small degree of musical literacy. Fiddlers like Fred Reid, John Ferguson and Charlie Bremner use open string chordings only sparingly and tend to be melodically very specific in the older repertoire. Clearly, the literate fiddler's respect for the specific style of published tune-variants may have its influence, and certainly there are other pressures, social and musical, which

mitigate against a harmonic-melodic style.

It may be that harmonic-melodic fiddle style is becoming something of an anachronism, and is confined to older players in Speyside and the North East generally. It is certainly likely that it was once much more prevalent in the Spey Valley than it is now, and that the fall in population and general breakdown of community life in the area has led to a fragmentation of styles with the older harmonic style on the wane. Wider opportunities for musical education and a lack of opportunities to play for dancing has caused more fiddlers to play in a clearer, more melodically explicit fashion.

This last point, the gradual disappearance of the fiddler from the dance situation, needs further elaboration in this context. It would be true to say that, in the Spey Valley, and probably in the whole of the North East, the piano accordion has largely supplanted the fiddle as the normal medium for traditional dance music. In traditional dance bands, the fiddle retains a somewhat tenuous position and generally it is accompanied by one or more accordions with piano - and in these conditions is barely audible. As John Grant says (App. 1, p.187):

'You can't go against the accordion wi a fiddle...  
wi the fearful noise it makes. You never hear a  
fiddle wi an accordion.'

Fiddlers who are accustomed to playing for dancing with accordions doubling the melody line (and, moreover, providing chordal harmonies) are not likely to play in a harmonic style, especially since, as Willie Reid of Dufftown ~~says~~, they commonly have to play the melody an octave higher in order to compete with

the accompaniment. One might refer back to Gerson-Kiwi's assertion that the 'drone' effect produced by a harmonic playing style lends 'psychological support' to the player's performance and conclude that the presence of a strong harmonic accompaniment (either on accordion or piano) renders such harmonic style unnecessary. Similarly the need for unaccompanied fiddlers playing for dancing to fill out the sound harmonically and to 'rest', as it were, on the open strings from time to time is diminished by the presence of a loud accompaniment. Thus players like Charlie Bremner, who has considerable experience of dance playing but this usually with a band which includes accordion and piano, is even less likely to play in harmonic style than his musical literacy would, in any case, lead one to expect. John Grant, however, was generally unaccompanied when he played for dancing (though, of course, there were sometimes other fiddlers, all doubling in unison), and in this sort of situation there were no such limitations on harmonic-melodic style.

In conclusion it must be said that we have no definitive answer to the problem of whether a harmonic-melodic style is anything more than a highly personal element in the playing of a few individuals. We have no documentary evidence to show whether or not it existed any more widely among Scots fiddlers of the 18th Century, or, for that matter, of the 19th. And we cannot say whether it was, in fact, the predominant fiddle style in the early stages of the violin's introduction into Scotland, a hang-over from the technique and style of the pre-violin Scots fiddles -

the fedyl, rybid (rebec) and croud<sup>71</sup>. However the construction of these instruments made a harmonic-melodic style inevitable, and the likelihood of early (violin) fiddlers approaching the newly imported instrument in a similar manner seems strong.

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<sup>71</sup> Collinson, op. cit., p. 199

## Chapter 5

RHYTHM - STYLE AND STRUCTURE  
OF THE STRATHSPEY

'...You wouldn't be a good player if you haven't got good time...' (John Grant, App. 1, p.192).

Charles Seeger's description of rhythm as 'successions of events in time'<sup>72</sup> can be adapted for this study of style to 'ways of ordering successions of events in time'. Using this flexible definition as a basis for analysis, I shall discuss rhythm in the playing of Strathspey fiddlers in three ways: firstly, in the present chapter, I shall examine the rhythmic structure of the strathspey itself and its relationship to playing style; secondly, I shall analyse bowing-style among Speyside fiddlers and, in a wider context, examine attitudes to style and technique of both unschooled and schooled Scots fiddlers; finally, I shall discuss, again with special reference to the strathspey, non-regular rhythmic style and especially the stylistic concept called 'lilt' by some fiddlers.

It is neither my intention to speculate upon the origin of the strathspey, nor to discuss its historical development. But it would be useful, before beginning a discussion of the finer points of performance style, to summarise briefly the formal and stylistic characteristics of the music of this dance-form.

Formally, the strathspey is similar to the reel; that is to say that it is a binary movement of two eight-bar halves. In general,

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Seeger, On the Formational Apparatus of the Music Compositional Process, in Ethnomusicology, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Middletown, 1969).

when played for dancing in modern practice, the tune is played continuously without repeats of the individual sections, though fiddlers playing outside the context of the dance normally repeat each half, making the whole a thirty-two rather than a sixteen-bar unit.

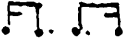
The most distinctive feature of the strathspey is, of course, the dotted rhythm  (and various permutations of this sequence), as well as its relatively slow tempo, though variation in tempo between different types of strathspey can be quite large. Strathspeys were first referred to in collections of dance music in the first half of the 18th century as 'Strathspey Reels', and many authorities have agreed that the early strathspeys were a slowed-down form of reel, a distinctive style, in fact, of reel-dancing, rather than a structure. The origin of the dotted 'scotch snap' rhythmic unit remains a matter for debate, the most popular attribution being to the rhythmic idiom of sung Gaelic.<sup>73</sup> Emmerson cites four examples of rhythmic sequences representative of strathspey structure as follows:

fig. 11



and seems to regard these almost as 'categories' into which all or most strathspeys can be placed, though it is not clear whether he

<sup>73</sup> Emmerson, op. cit., 1971, p. 145.

regards them as invariable or subject to modification within a given context. It may be that these four sequences are taken as being characteristic of the majority of tunes published in the most widely used collections, or that they are based on those rhythmic structures most favoured by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. In any case, Emmerson does go on to suggest that 'the taste of the performer' may to some degree determine distinct styles of strathspey 'from those which are akin to jigs to those which are legato, andante airs'.<sup>74</sup>

We may ask, then, whether there can be said to be any consistency in fiddlers' use of types of rhythmic sequence in strathspey playing, or whether 'strathspey rhythm' is merely a generalised concept based on the requirement of dotted rhythms to be played in any order (according to 'the taste of the performer') in the stipulated metric form.

In order to examine this question it is useful to compare several variants of the same piece, including published variants from fiddle collections most commonly used by Scots fiddlers in this century. An examination of examples from the most popular of these - Kerr's Merry Melodies<sup>75</sup> and Skinner's Scottish Violinist will show that a large number of well-known tunes do not conform in rhythmic sequence to any of Emmerson's examples. However, it could be said that, while many of the early fiddle manuscripts may have been transcriptions (not necessarily accurate) of performance practice of the time, the more recent published collections are rather more prescriptive in

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>75</sup> J. S. Kerr, Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin, 4 vols. (Kerr, Glasgow, c. 1900).  
Skinner, op. cit.



style. Indeed, Skinner's published versions do not always concur with his recordings of the same tunes, as we shall see later. It would seem unlikely that traditional fiddlers, even some of those who are musically literate, are greatly influenced by the rhythmic notation of the published tune-books, at least not to the extent that they can be by the melodic notation, since the ability to read complex rhythmic sequences requires a training found only among schooled fiddlers.

It may be that the rhythmic structure of the strathspey has always been to some extent a product of the style of the individual, as fluid in its way as the melodic structure and less tied to a single identifiable bowing style than is often supposed. Certainly, the early fiddle manuscripts make no attempt to notate the dotted rhythms, their compilers assuming, perhaps, that fiddlers were familiar enough with the expected style to be capable of improvising it in performance - rather in the manner of 'notes inegales' in 17th century French keyboard style.

Bowing/rhythmic styles among my Strathspey informants differ, as one would expect, from one individual to another to the extent that, while there are shared aspects of bowing technique which may be said to be 'traditional', these are not sufficient to justify any claim for a distinctively regional style. We shall see, in Chapter 6, how fiddlers differ in concepts of 'correctness' in bowing-style, but for the present it will be necessary to examine the musical evidence only.

One of the most popular strathspeys in North East Scotland is The Smith's a Gallant Fireman (sometimes known as Carrick's Rant) which figures prominently in the repertoire of all informants

interviewed in Speyside. A comparison of three performances from Strathspey and two published versions reveals some important differences as well as a fair degree of similarity in rhythmic style. The following table illustrates the rhythmic patterns of three recorded performances by John Grant, John Lindsay and Charlie Bremner respectively,<sup>76</sup> and two published variants from Kerr's and Skinner's (Scottish Violinist) collections<sup>77</sup> respectively:

fig. 12

J.G.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
J.L.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
C.B.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
Kerr:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
S.V.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.

J.G.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
J.L.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
C.B.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
Kerr:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.
S.V.:	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.

The first sixteen bars are quoted, giving the tune complete without repeats. It can be seen that all of these five variants differ considerably in detail, though two of the recorded performances, those of Grant and Lindsay, are in most respects quite similar in

<sup>76</sup> See Examples 2, 14 and 21 in App. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Kerr, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 4 and Skinner, op. cit., p. 16.

rhythmic style. The two published versions are also alike in most respects. Rhythmically one might say that this strathspey is not altogether typical of the genre in that the 'snap' rhythm can be, and usually is, comparatively unimportant to its structure, especially in the first four bars - the part of the tune which 'identifies' it and sets its stylistic character. But the snap is used, in most variants, on the final beat of the fourth bar (and at other corresponding parts of the tune) with the 'lift' of a rising major third - a characteristic of this tune as well as several others, including Marshall's Marquis of Huntly's Farewell.<sup>78</sup> The musical 'lift' at the end of the phrase coincides with the skip in the strathspey dance step.

In this example, however, it is possible to recognise the existence of a generalised strathspey style in the rhythmic patterns employed, though as the bowings indicated in the full transcriptions (App. 2) indicate, there is by no means a consensus of opinion on the technical means used. If we look first at the individual rhythmic units employed in these variants, it can be seen that, despite general agreement on the rhythmic style of the tune there are significant differences in sequence at certain points. The most obvious of these are:

(a) Bar 7 and its corresponding bar in the second 'turning', bar 15: here the two published versions are diametrically opposed, Kerr using the dotted-quaver plus semiquaver rhythmic unit for all four beats, while Skinner reverses this to use the snap on all four beats. John Lindsay and Charlie Bremner are identical, using both

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<sup>78</sup> In W. Marshall, Collection of Strathspey Reels (Edinburgh, 1781), p.1.

these rhythms in pairs with the snap on the second and fourth beats. John Grant's version, however, is different in each of these two bars: in bar 6, the rhythmic units are evened out, except on the fourth beat, into quavers, while in bar 15, the first two beats have the dotted rhythm and the second two the snap.

(b) Charlie Bremner's variant does not use the snap on the third beats of bars 1 and 3 as the others do (including the printed examples). This perhaps typifies his strathspey playing style, which makes comparatively little use of the snap.
















Other smaller variations of rhythmic unit are, for example, Mr. Grant's use of a snap on the first two beats of bar 4, and Lindsay's and Grant's use of a snap on the second beat of bar 12 where the other versions use the dotted-quaver, semiquaver unit.

Two further examples serve to strengthen an impression of a structural fluidity arising out of stylistic diversity in performance. The Devil in the Kitchen (see App. 2, Example 12), a tune as often played by pipers as by fiddlers, has a simple melodic and tonal structure centred on the open fifth A-E. The following rhythmic transcription gives two recorded performances, by John Ferguson and Jimmy Ross (Examples 12 and 13) and Skinner's published setting<sup>79</sup> (which has the attribution 'W. Ross, H. M. Piper, adapted for violin by J. Scott Skinner'). This tune, by its very nature, allows less freedom of choice in rhythm, but the first four bars of the second turning show that differing sequences of rhythmic units are possible:













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<sup>79</sup> Skinner, op. cit., p. 11.

fig. 13

J.F.:					
S.V.:					
J.R.:					

J.F.:				
S.V.:				
J.R.:				

In the fifth bar, Jimmy Ross uses a snap on the third beat where the other two versions use dotted-quaver plus semiquaver, though he too uses this unit in the corresponding repeat in bar 3. On the second beat of bar 4 we find three different rhythmic units in use, Skinner having two semiquavers plus quaver - in effect a snap. Ferguson's tendency to play a triplet throughout the tune where Skinner and Ross use this snap equivalent reflects his looser bowing style. In this example, then, the rhythmic variants are smaller and perhaps less significant, but that may be to some extent a consequence of the tune's close association, for fiddlers, with the pipes and pipe-idiom where, rhythmically speaking, the snap is particularly characteristic and firmly established as a structural 'essential' of the tune.

A third example, The Laird o Drumblair, is particularly interesting since it is a comparatively recent addition to the repertoire and has a close association for many fiddlers with the performance style of Scott Skinner, its composer. It was recorded by him (Example 18) and is represented in figure 14 along with the published version in The Scottish Violinist.<sup>80</sup> As we have seen, many older fiddlers in Strathspey learned this, and other of Skinner's compositions, from his gramophone recordings, a fact that might suggest that it would be less subject to melodic and rhythmic variation in oral tradition.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

To a substantial degree this is the case, but there is, nevertheless, a fair amount of rhythmic difference between the versions quoted below. These are transcriptions of the first turning (i.e. bars 1 to 8) in performance by John Grant of which the first is played on the fiddle (Example 1) and the second diddled (see App. 1, p.196); Alec Grant (Ex. 11); Bill Hardie of Aberdeen (Ex. 19) and Scott Skinner (Ex. 18). The final transcription is that from *The Scottish Violinist*.

Fig. 14

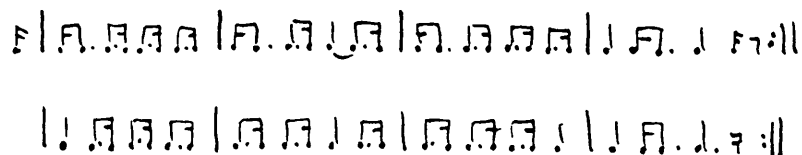
J.G.:	♩. ♩. ♩.	♩. ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩ ♩ ♩	♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
J.G. (diddled) ♩	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
A.G.: ♩	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
B.H.: ♩	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
S.V.: ♩	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
Skinner doc: ♩	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
	♩. ♩. ♩.	♩. ♩. ♩.	"	♩ ♩. ♩ ♩
	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"
	♩ ♩. ♩.	♩ ♩. ♩.	"	"

Bill Hardie's performance shows how strongly even the schooled fiddler adheres to oral tradition, for his version follows the recorded version of Skinner very closely in tempo and bowing-style, and also in the fact that he does not use the snap on the third beat of bars 1 and 5 as is printed in *The Scottish Violinist*. It is curious that Skinner should deviate in performance from the rhythm of his published version

in this way, but interesting that Hardie, who is often cited as the finest living exponent of the 'Scott Skinner Style'<sup>81</sup> should apparently choose to follow the example of sound rather than print. Alec Grant, too, uses the same rhythmic sequences as Skinner's recorded version, though in other aspects of style his performance is somewhat different. John Grant, however, has two rhythmic variants, each of them different from all the above examples. He plays a snap on the first beats of bars 1, 2, 5 and 6 and, in his diddled variant, the snap moves from the second to the third beat of bars 1 and 5 and disappears from bars 2 and 6.

Again we find that there is no apparent rule governing the nature of rhythmic units in strathspey playing, and we are drawn to the conclusion that rhythmic structure is, in fact, a function of the individual's bowing-style. In that type of strathspey where the fourth-beat snap at the end of each two-bar phrase is especially characteristic (The Smith's a Gallant Fireman and Craigellachie Bridge, Ex. 4, are examples), we have a clear departure from the more common use of a snap on 'strong' (i.e. first and third) beats. Thus it may be that occurrence of the snap rhythmic unit is in some cases inseparable from the melodic structure of the tune. But we can find examples where the snap is played on a beat which appears to perform no particularly 'strong' or 'weak' function within the structure, as in the following example from John Grant's own composition, The Braes o Tulloch (App. 1, p.191):

fig. 15



<sup>81</sup> See Emerson, op. cit., 1971, p. 106.

Here bars 4 and 8 have the snap on the second beat, where it could have no formal or dance-related function, except, perhaps, as a means of underlining the cadence, indeed of making the second beat equal to the others in strength without actually accenting it. Mr. Grant's comparatively restrained use of the snap in this tune contrasts with his rather extensive use of it in the other examples I have discussed, and in most strathspeys in his repertoire - and this emphasises again my conclusion that we can talk only of a generalised strathspey playing style, a rhythmic idiom rather than a rhythmically explicit structure. I shall go on to discuss bowing style and its relationship to the strathspey idiom in Chapter 6.



## Chapter 6

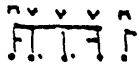
## RHYTHM AND BOWING STYLE

Of all the aspects of the traditional fiddler's technique, the one which, in Scotland at least, is most often cited as distinguishing him from the 'classical' violinist (or, indeed, from fiddlers who are not regarded as 'traditional') is bowing. 'Bowing', in itself, of course, covers several aspects of the way fiddlers play, including the way the bow is held and even the shape of the bridge - but generally the term, as used by fiddlers and other interested musicians, refers to the ways in which the bow is used to articulate rhythm.

In this chapter, I propose to examine bowing-style in the playing of my informants in Speyside, and to discuss and compare attitudes to technique, especially bowing technique, among schooled as well as unschooled players from North East Scotland as a whole. That there is conflict between some of these attitudes is only to be expected, but the nature of that conflict is in itself, I believe, revealing in the light it sheds on the fiddle tradition of Scotland as it is today. It must be stated that bowing is for several reasons rather difficult to study in depth. Transcription, for example, is very difficult if only the sound (i.e. taped) evidence is used, and for complete accuracy and very detailed information the transcriber must have a film of the performance. The cost of filming makes its use quite impractical in the context of the present study, so that the bowing transcriptions quoted here must necessarily be open to correction. I am satisfied, however, that careful transcription from sound recordings, coupled with time spent watching the informants perform live and questioning them on technique, will have produced a degree of accuracy which is

quite adequate for this analysis.

I shall concentrate again on bowing in strathspeys, because the strathspey is generally regarded by fiddlers as the test of a true traditional player, and because it is here that we can see most clearly what it is that is peculiar to the fiddler's, as opposed to the violinist's, technique.

Documentary evidence on the bowing styles of Scots fiddlers before the nineteenth century is scant, though several writers have referred to Niel Gow's particularly skilled use of the up-bow in strathspeys. This technique, in which dotted rhythms are executed, as in the following example: , with a particularly short, rapid upward flick at the end of the series of two or more up-strokes, has come to be regarded as a special skill of Scots fiddlers, and one which marks them out as exponents of their own music in the 'authentic' traditional manner. Of course, this is only one of several 'tricks' of the Scots fiddler, but it is perhaps the most striking in effect and, perhaps, most difficult in execution, though the latter is an opinion which one might consider to be unreasonably cherished by fiddlers. Both Emerson<sup>82</sup> and Collinson<sup>83</sup> quote from contemporary accounts of Gow's playing style, and his impressive up-bowing gains special mention, though these writers describe it in terms of its remarkable strength (and agility) rather than in a way which might give us a more detailed idea of its musical effect.

Collinson sums up his brief discussion of Gow's bowing and its influence thus:

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<sup>82</sup> Emerson, op. cit., pp. 176-177.  
<sup>83</sup> Collinson, op. cit., p. 221.

'Whether Niel Gow invented the stroke it is impossible now to say; probably it is as old as the strathspey itself and was used by the Cummings and Macphersons and Browns of Speyside. Certain it is that every Scots fiddler since Niel Gow's time has been judged on the power and agility of his up-bow stroke.'

In saying this Collinson is quite probably correct, and there is indeed no evidence to show otherwise, but his final sentence places him firmly in agreement with leading schooled fiddlers of today in the emphasis on bowing technique as a prerequisite for 'proper' performance within the 'rules' of the tradition, and represents more the 'folk-view' of these fiddlers, I would suggest, than the objective evaluation of a detached observer.

A preoccupation with bowing technique is, then, found in the work of recent writers such as Collinson, whose own ideas are clearly an expression of attitudes they have often heard voiced by schooled members of the Scots fiddling world, particularly articulate and highly respected players like Hector McAndrew and William Hardie of Aberdeen and 'authorities' on the tradition like J. Murdoch Henderson (also of Aberdeen) and John Junner of Banchory. In interviewing and recording these musicians<sup>84</sup> Collinson and others have tended to regard them and a few others as the sole possessors of the fast-disappearing traditional skills and knowledge which, they feel, distinguish the Scots tradition, and have perhaps tended to accept at face-value many of the statements that these players make about their playing, and especially the unusual emphasis they are accustomed to place on bowing technique. I hope to show that this gives a rather incomplete picture, not only of fiddle style and technique, but also of the

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<sup>84</sup> Much of Collinson's book is based on his collecting for the School of Scottish Studies.

attitudes and opinions of fiddlers in general, and particularly those of Speyside. While it is undoubtedly true that many aspects of playing style have disappeared or altered out of recognition, it is, I think, misleading to interpret these facts as meaning the end of traditional fiddle-playing in Scotland; if the tradition is dying, the disappearance of older bowing styles can only be a very small symptom of a complicated process.

It seems possible that some of the more celebrated fiddlers, even before the 19th century, may have had formal violin tuition of some kind, and the influence of Italian and German musicians in 18th century Edinburgh was clearly considerable<sup>85</sup> not only in the effect they had on instrumental technique, but also on the compositions of traditional fiddlers of the time. Emmerson<sup>86</sup> suggests, however, that any such influence could only have been slight in the case of Niel Gow and William Marshall, since, as 'country-bred, self-taught' fiddlers, any tuition in classical technique would have little effect on their already ingrained habits of style.

It was in the second half of the 19th century that the influence of European virtuoso violin playing had its strongest effect on the course of the Scots fiddle tradition, and the outstanding figure of that period and of the beginning of this century was the fiddler-composer whose playing and publications have dominated the world of the Scots fiddler ever since: James Scott Skinner.

Skinner's technique was that of the 'schooled' fiddler par excellence. His early career was unquestionably that of a classically

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<sup>85</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> Emmerson, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

trained violinist, as a pupil, from the age of twelve, of the Manchester violinist Dr. Mark and, concurrently, of Charles Rougier, a member of the Hallé Orchestra.<sup>87</sup> But before leaving home as a boy he had had lessons from his elder brother, Sandy, a traditional fiddler, and had played with another well-known North-East fiddler, Peter Milne. Traditional aspects of style were, therefore, likely to be part of his technical equipment before his move to Manchester, and they were no doubt reinforced when he returned to Aberdeenshire to work as a dancing master at the end of his apprenticeship to Dr. Mark.

Skinner's own compositions, however, reflect his interest in a greatly expanded bowing technique and his popularity as a concert performer must have been enhanced by his love of display and the kind of violin pyrotechnics which amazed his country audiences:<sup>88</sup>

'He did not even descend in my estimation in his trick performance à la Paganini. He has evidently made the left-hand pizzicato and harmonic playing a study, which enables him to give an effective rendering of the bird-like sounds...'

John Grant's memories of his own visit to one of Skinner's concerts in Nethy Bridge village hall around the beginning of the First World War suggest that such novelty effects had become a standard part of Skinner's performance: 'he could make even the birds sing...' <sup>89</sup>

Skinner's popularity, coupled with an apparently strong, somewhat egotistical personality, helped to give his own theories on playing style as wide a currency as his compositions. He was, indeed, not content to be a performer and composer, but clearly saw himself as the

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>88</sup>From a testimonial quoted in Skinner, Logie Collection of Original Music for Voice, Violin and Pianoforte (Feith, 1888).

<sup>89</sup>SA 1973/145.

leader of a 'school' of fiddle-playing which would revitalise the tradition which was deemed to be in danger of being weakened and, eventually, overcome by the growing taste of Victorian Scots for 'the so-called classical music'. His response was to publish a 'Guide to Bowing Strathspeys, Reels, Pastoral Melodies, Hornpipes, etc.',<sup>90</sup> a fascinating little book which displays very clearly the attitudes and prejudices of Skinner and his admirers of the time, and bears a direct relationship to many of the attitudes current among schooled fiddlers of today.

In his brief introduction, Skinner mentions the importance of individuality in performance of strathspeys and says that it

'...must be added by each player in his or her own natural way. Herein lies the charm and also the difficulty of forming a Strathspey School, as the individuality of each player would become extinct in the hands of ever so good a teacher, unless he was a lover of "The Blue Hills" and a patriotic Scot.'<sup>91</sup>

The nationalistic tone and references to 'our national music' are hardly surprising given that they were written at a time when the 'Celtic Twilight' was a widespread expression of a nostalgia for the past glories of Scottish traditional culture and, indeed, when even the political atmosphere was dominated by the Irish Home Rule movement to the extent that a parallel, though weaker, movement had begun in Scotland: for example, the Liberal Scottish Home Rule Association had in 1894 persuaded the House of Commons to pass a resolution favouring the establishment of a separate Scottish Legislature.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Bayley and Ferguson, Glasgow, c. 1900.

<sup>91</sup> Skinner, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> J. D. Mackie, A History of Scotland (London, 1964), pp. 367-8.

The 'Guide to Bowing' contains two introductory essays - one signed 'W. M.', the other a letter from 'a friend'. Both of these are eulogies of Skinner's talents and the second in particular goes to some lengths to place the Scots strathspey beside the works of the great classical composers: 'There is room for all forms of excellence without each jostling the other.'<sup>93</sup> On the following page the 'friend' praises Skinner's technical accomplishments:

'It is one thing to hear a strathspey rasped out by some awkward gut-scraper, and quite another to hear it spring forth vivid and entrancing, as it does from under the strokes of your bow.'

And he considers that the intending fiddler

'must first overcome the mechanical difficulties of performance, become expert in all the technical details of fingering and bowing, which are peculiar to the strathspey.'

This letter ends with perhaps the most revealing sentence of all:

'...I have a strong conviction that you will found a school of strathspey playing, and that just as your compositions are gradually winning their way to popularity, so will your style of playing, as far as it can be taught, become prevalent.'<sup>94</sup>

It is clear from the way Skinner and his admirers expressed themselves, that he regarded himself as guardian, or even saviour, of the Scots fiddle tradition. Indeed, there is an unyielding dogmatism about his attitude to the performance of Scots fiddle music that seems to spring partly from a rather defensive posture in the face of what was seen as the 'decline' of the tradition, and also from the superior position (among fiddlers) of having an impressive 'classical' training.

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<sup>93</sup> Skinner, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>94</sup> Skinner, op. cit., p. 12.

The 'Guide' itself covers Skinner's use of traditional (and newly-invented) bowing styles, giving copious music examples to illustrate techniques, many of which would be beyond the unschooled fiddler, and, again, couched in rather quaint language, there is the exhortation to acquire a ('classical') technique. Thus:

'To become a good player, the services of a firm and strict master is indispensable. Kreutzer, Rode, Baillot, Loder, Scarbrook, Spohr, Papini are all very fine. All these are not necessary; but there are individual studies in each that are exceedingly useful, particularly Kreutzer's Study in C, which shows very clearly the first three positions.' <sup>95</sup>

It should be remembered that none of the older pieces in the traditional fiddler's repertoire goes higher than the first position.

Later, Skinner recommends lessons in deportment and suggests that even 'natural geniuses' like Captain Simon Fraser, Niel Gow, Marshall and others 'would have soared even higher had they received a good sound training in manual equipment'.<sup>96</sup> Skinner often refers to the fiddler as a 'violinist' - indeed, his most popular collection is entitled the 'Scottish Violinist' rather than the 'Scottish Fiddler' - another reflection of his defensive attitude to the rather low public image of the uneducated country fiddler.

The obsession with technique was, then, as much as anything born of a fear that the traditional fiddler's art was in imminent danger of being lost. Certainly, Skinner was very much an innovator, but he did also insist on perpetuating many of the 'traditional' aspects of playing style, however lost these may have become in the pyrotechnics of some of his more elaborate compositions. It would be true to say

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<sup>95</sup> Skinner, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 32.



that, at the turn of the century, there was a real feeling that not only the techniques, but the music itself might soon fall out of use completely, and until the appearance of the accordion-based dance band and the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society<sup>97</sup> between the wars, traditional dance music was declining in popularity, especially in the towns.

That feeling exists, perhaps with more reason, among fiddlers (schooled and unschooled) today - paradoxically because the arrival of the accordion, which did so much to ensure the popularity of Scottish dance music in the thirties, has rendered the fiddle largely redundant in a dance context. But the influence of Skinner, too, is still remarkably strong in the attitudes of many present-day fiddlers of the schooled category towards bowing technique and its importance. A comparison of some of these attitudes with those of Skinner shows that very little has changed. The following is an edited transcript of an interview with Hector McAndrew, broadcast by the BBC:

McAndrew:

'This bowing...it's...sort of...born in you...it ...I feel it in myself, you know you can't help but doing it. It's a thing that can be taught - but...eh...unless it's absolutely born in you it would...take a long, long time...to be done properly to make the music flow.

Interviewer:

This is the special up-bowing which is traditional to Scottish fiddle music?

McA.: Absolutely - it's essential to Scottish music to get the proper rhythm...the proper lilt and lift in it. It seemed to be in myself, and whenever my father showed me it, I could do it with this fluency...right away...whereas if you were going to teach someone it would take them...years to do it properly. They'll do it in a fashion, but in a jerky fashion.

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<sup>97</sup> Founded in 1923.

Int.: Now is it going to be carried on, are there any other people coming after you who...?

McA.: Oh, it seems to me at present to be a lost art altogether...I can't see it...because it's definitely not used now.

Int.: Why are the young violinists in Scotland not interested in the up-bowings...do they know about it?

McA.: I don't think they know about it...you see...it's very seldom marked in a book. You'll get it in one or two of the old books, but not the present book...there's no...bowings marked hardly at all in the present editions of Scotch music at all...'  
(from SM 1969/2)

The following is a transcript of part of a talk by William (Bill) Hardie, the Aberdeen fiddler who is regarded by many fiddlers as the only one now playing in the true 'Scott Skinner style', and by Hector McAndrew as the only fiddler beside himself who is carrying on the skills of the 'lost art'. It is followed by a talk (transcribed from the same tape) by the late J. Murdoch Henderson, another leading figure in the Scottish fiddling 'establishment', who published collections of traditional fiddle music which included music of his own composition. He was also regarded as an expert on the 'Skinner style':

Bill Hardie:

'...As far as...strathspey playing's concerned... the...great virtue and merit...lies in the bowing ...and, eh...it has to be absolutely studied...it's got to be studied minutely, and in detail...and, as a whole of course...to...get the best results ...it's got to be phrased...to convey...the message of the tune.'

J. Murdoch Henderson:

'In Perthshire...in the earlier days...Miel Gow was the leader. Later on...considerably later... Scott Skinner was the leader. Scott Skinner... used...a great deal of technique...thoroughly unknown and I should say beyond the powers of Miel Gow. Skinner then has been the leader since. But Skinner didn't use all the technique possible and desirable for strathspey and reel playing. I might even claim to have introduced some myself -

but I have also analysed and incorporated techniques employed by other, older teachers. Mr. Hardie... is the only player at the present day...who... attempts...very successfully, the multitude of bowing strokes which I advocate for strathspeys. As he said...these tunes require very careful study. Some strokes required for them are not at all easy, and it requires really brains to work them out. And it requires, of course, manual dexterity to... get them to sound properly. That's strathspey and reel playing that I'm mentioning today. Strathspeys in particular. The chief trouble nowadays is we're losing the technique. Even supposing I take great pains to indicate the bowing...so few of the players can read those bowings properly, and...perhaps fewer can...actually put them, give effect to them...that's the real trouble.'

(SA 1959/6)

As a comparison with the above statements on bowing technique by leading schooled fiddlers, the remarks of unschooled fiddlers on the subject are interesting. The following excerpts from conversations with John Grant refer not so much to the specific problem of bowing but reveal an attitude to playing in general which contrasts sharply with that of the schooled player:

'...I would put him [Skinner] on there - on the gramophone...and you could tone him...you could take the gramophone...back...I would let him go at it till I just got it right in ma heid tae... ye know...and then I would take the fiddle and I would follow him. Oh...you might miss a note, or two, but you'd be very sure that you had your tune...' (App. 1, p.181 )

'...Aye, well they wouldna care a bit as long as you kept good time and gave them...gave them music...' (App. 1, p.187 )

H.M.: 'What's the most difficult thing to do when you're bowing a strathspey?

J.G.: Well...you'll have to say what old Skinner said... you must have plenty...kick in it an plenty o the Devil in it...old Skinner used to say, if you canna pull...if you can't pull your bow - you can't play a strathspey! You'll have to pull it from end to end.

...I pull the bow - now a lot o them take it out with their fingers...the way I do it...that's the way Skinner used to do...you're supposed to lift your bow in strathspeys...' (App. 1, p.201)

'Take Shetland then...well, now - the Shetland's nearer to the way we play...I think it's all in the bowing. It's the way they bow the fiddle, the way they play with their bows...I've heard them on the records like - I've heard the Forty Fiddlers<sup>98</sup> playing there [on the radio]...they play terrible like the way we play hereabout...they've got the same style. Now, the like o Hector McAndrew an that...them over from Banchory and Aberdeenshire - they play more like Skinner's style.

...There's Hector McAndrew...well he's just a...he plays the tune but he hasna got the style that Skinner has got. No, he hasna got the kick in it.' (App. 1, p.195)

The following are some other, briefer comments on bowing from Speyside fiddlers - Alec Grant of Carrbridge, John Ferguson of Carrbridge, John Lindsay of Tomintoul, and Fred Reid of Dufftown:

H.M.: 'What is it about the bowing that's so important?

Alec Grant:

Ach, I don't know. It's no sae much that - the bowing that suits yersel, I think is the best thing.'

H.M.: 'What's the secret of strathspey bowing?

John Ferguson:

...I just couldna explain to you, right enough. Comes naturally to you...' (SA 1973/141)

John Lindsay:

'...I don't bow correctly.' (SA 1973/145)

H.M.: 'Can you show me how it is you bow a strathspey?

Fred Reid:

Well, I jist play fair through...' (SA 1973/142)

Strong differences of attitude and of priorities are clear from these two sets of quotations. It is of course true that these two

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<sup>98</sup> The Forty Fiddlers, officially the Shetland Folk Society, have broadcast frequently from Lerwick.

groups of fiddlers represent, in some respects, opposite poles of the tradition and that there are many fiddlers in between whose views may incline one way or the other with differing degrees of emphasis. However, there is a very obvious split (which is more cultural than social) between these two kinds of fiddler and almost all of my informants from Speyside fall under the second of the two poles.

Both groups of fiddlers tend towards self-contradiction on the question of bowing technique: the 'schooled' fiddlers, like Hector McAndrew, tend to lay great emphasis on claims of having had the tradition 'handed down' to them or having even inherited it by birth while, at the same time, they advocate diligent study of bowings and lament the fact that these are too often left out of published fiddle books.

The 'unschooled' fiddlers, on the other hand, reveal internal contradictions of a different kind: for many of them the question of bowing (as well as other aspects of technique) is difficult to discuss, partly because they lack the knowledge of simple musical terminology required to articulate a process which they have never found it necessary to think about as a problem. Bowing techniques are, after all, learned by these fiddlers through imitative practice rather than technical explanation by a teacher. Thus, fiddlers like Alec Grant and John Ferguson are able only to talk in terms of this skill as a 'natural' one or as something, as in the case of Fred Reid, that one does without thinking. There is also, among many 'unschooled' players, the feeling of inadequacy which arises from often-heard statements by 'schooled' fiddlers on the great importance of the 'art' of traditional bowing: thus, John Lindsay's remark that he is not able to bow 'correctly'. Others, with a limited ability to read music, like

James Mackenzie<sup>99</sup> of Carrbridge, and Fred Reid, tend to refer the interviewer to the published collection when asked about details of bowing, and find it difficult to demonstrate practically on the fiddle at a speed slower than that normally used for playing the piece in question.

It is significant, too, that John Grant, asked about bowing, quotes Scott Skinner in reply - and interesting that he does so in untechnical language while at the same time conveying very effectively the musical result that he feels good bowing should have. In fact, his remarks on bowing describe very well a characteristic of his own style of strathspey playing, where 'lifting the bow' is indeed important. His approach makes no distinction between types of bow-strokes, again no doubt because he would find it impossible to talk in terms of individual up or down-strokes, and clearly his concern to imbue the music with vigour and 'life' above all makes a contrast with McAndrew's concern for musical 'flow'. But the contradictions in his remarks are interesting, too, in the light they shed on his view of 'schooled' fiddlers. His appreciation of the Shetland fiddlers he has heard on radio broadcasts is understandable, because the sound produced by such groups as the 'Forty Fiddlers' is essentially similar to that of the Scots unschooled fiddler in its general lack of 'sophistication' (as opposed to the relatively 'sophisticated' sound of the schooled fiddlers who are usually broadcast) however different the musical idiom and details of style may be. He accounts for this similarity by choosing that aspect of technique, bowing, which he has most often heard discussed by 'schooled' fiddlers and assumes that it must be the reason

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<sup>99</sup>  
SA 1973/141.

for the familiarity of the Shetland style. Certainly, he could not have seen these Shetland players in order to examine their style of bowing.

At the same time he talks about the stylistic similarity between McAndrew and other well-known Aberdeenshire fiddlers, and Skinner, meaning again the generally sophisticated schooled sound they produce rather than any specific technical skill. Indeed he immediately appears to contradict himself by saying that McAndrew 'hasna got the style that Skinner has got', but here he is referring to bowing - maintaining that McAndrew's style lacks the rather more vigorous 'kick' of Skinner's.

It emerges from the evidence of these transcribed examples, that these unschooled fiddlers tend to find questions of bowing technique confusing and, in the last analysis, of very little interest. This is not to say that their bowing styles may not contain some of the traditional elements that schooled players might consider essential or, indeed, that they would not be critical of a player whose technique did not make use of them - but the difference between their attitudes, vague though they may be, and the very precise, sometimes dogmatic views of many schooled fiddlers is striking.

One would expect that a natural corollary of this difference in viewpoints would be a rather inconsistent practical application of traditional bowing techniques among these Speyside fiddlers with less clearly defined 'rules' than one would find among schooled fiddlers. In the following section, an examination of transcribed musical examples will show that this is indeed the case. It is impossible to say whether a lack of homogeneity in bowing style, along with other aspects of style in Speyside, is a result of the decline of the tradition there, and whether fiddlers of the unschooled category were

as articulate about bowing technique in the late nineteenth century as were Skinner and other schooled fiddlers of the time. It seems unlikely that this could be the case, though more than likely that bowing styles were considerably more homogeneous in a given area as they still are, to some extent, in parts of Shetland.

### Bowing Styles in Strathspey

It has already been stated that documentary evidence of bowing style before the late nineteenth century is very limited. A few modern fiddlers, of whom Hector McAndrew is one, claim to have inherited old styles of playing through a pupil-teacher line of descent from some notable historical figure in Scots fiddle-playing like Niel Gow. However true the claim may be, the vagaries of oral transmission are such that style, even more than the musical structure itself, cannot safely be assumed to have emerged unchanged over a span of several generations. This makes it extremely difficult to detect old or archaic aspects in the style of a player, and to distinguish other aspects which may reflect more recent influences.

One cannot say, then, that John Grant's bowing style - which concurs with his quotation of Skinner's example in its emphasis on 'lifting' the bow - is necessarily of such comparatively recent origin, or that his father, and generations of fiddlers before him, did not play in the same way.

This comparison of bowing styles among Speyside fiddlers, therefore, does not attempt to trace origins, but rather illustrates how it is possible for rhythmic styles to be quite diverse among musicians within a small area and with a fairly similar social and music-educational background. It suggests, too, that the schooled fiddler's obsession



with technique, and with criteria based on bowing-style on which to judge what is 'traditional' or 'untraditional' in fiddle-playing, becomes to some extent irrelevant in relation to unschooled fiddlers.

It would, of course, be of little use merely to describe a fiddler's bowing style in simple terms of up and down-strokes. This kind of approach would yield no more information about bowing-style than would the bowing indications provided in a few of the published fiddle collections, and would certainly convey very little of the musical character of the performance. This analysis will be concerned as much with the rhythmic style produced by different approaches to bowing as much as the mechanics of the bowing technique itself, and will thus relate directly to the later discussion of rhythmic 'expression' in the strathspey performances of certain players.

In any musical tradition where the social framework which supports it is seriously weakened it would seem likely that the resulting lack of communication between tradition-bearers might lead to a stylistic diversity which may be exaggerated where the sample of performers is small. In Speyside the social situations in which the fiddler was formerly found, principally the village dance and the fiddle band, have all but ceased to exist as a regular focus for music-making and the fiddler's performance is confined increasingly to his own home as a more personal, isolated form of musical recreation.

As all of the Speyside fiddlers represented here formerly took part as performers in either or both of these social settings, a few of them even playing together in exactly the same situation (the fiddle band), one might expect this stylistic diversity to be a comparatively recent phenomenon - that, away from the more communal music-making of

former times the player 'develops' a different, more individual style. However, as has been mentioned in the discussion of learning processes, at least one fiddler, John Grant, has not significantly changed stylistically, on the evidence of earlier recordings, over a period of more than twenty years. While one has no such firm evidence in the case of other fiddlers, it would seem that the same would probably be true of them, and that, except for minor details of style, their playing is likely to have remained substantially the same.<sup>100</sup>

The five unschooled fiddlers on whose bowing styles I wish to concentrate represent a cross-section of styles within a fairly small geographical area of the Spey Valley. They represent, too, a wide age-group, from the eighty-eight-year-old Alec Grant to John Lindsay and Charlie Bremner who are in their late forties. As throughout this examination of style, I have taken John Grant as a principal informant and will use four examples of his strathspey-playing as a basis for analysis.

John Grant's style, in almost all its aspects, represents the opposite extreme from that of, for example, Charlie Bremner. The principal stylistic characteristics of the two are clear even from a superficial listening to their respective performances of The Smith's a Gallant Fireman: John Grant's version is more 'harmonic', making extensive use of open-string fifths with a somewhat 'paraphrased' melodic line, and is rhythmically slightly irregular with very long as well as very short bow strokes, and a good deal of detached bowing; Charlie Bremner's performance places much more emphasis on melody,

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<sup>100</sup> This does not take account of the effect on style of ageing, but in the case of bowing technique, one can still usually identify the musical intention, though its execution may be weaker than that of a younger man.

with hardly any open-string fifths and a very regular rhythmic style using a much smaller proportion of the length of the bow and producing a smoother, uninterrupted melodic line.

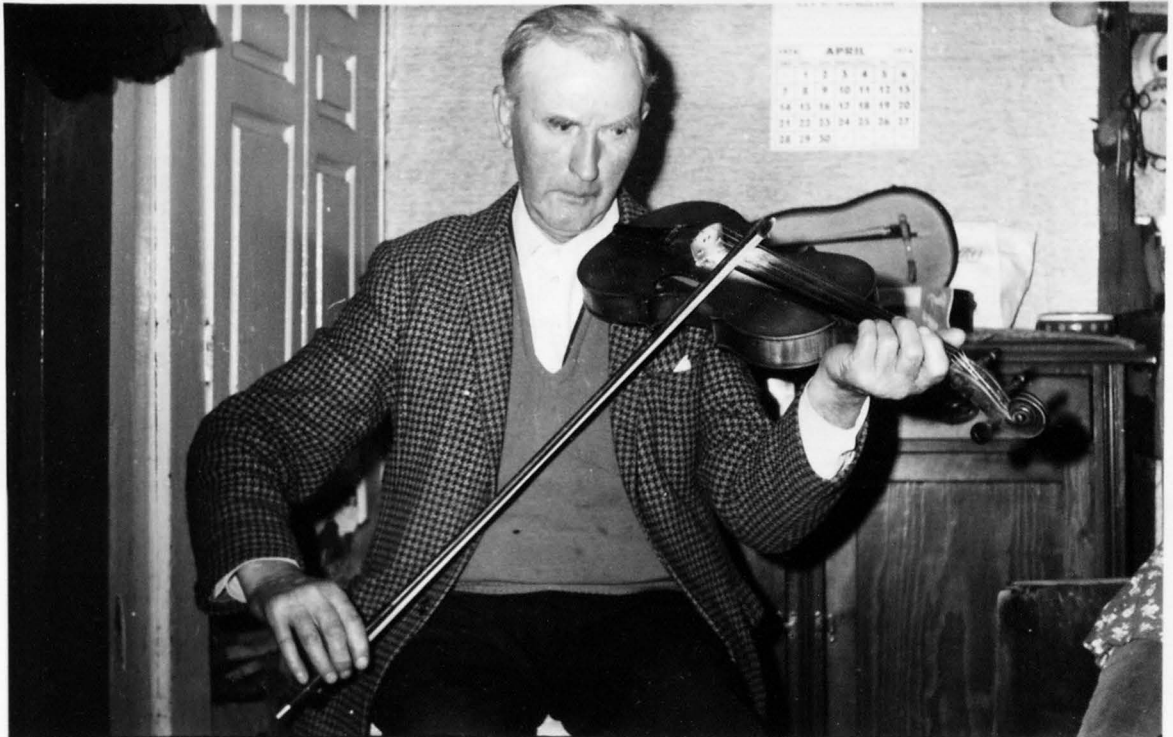
These two styles might be described as 'complex' and 'simple' as long as these words may be understood to refer to style rather than to technique. This is an important and not altogether obvious distinction, since the technique used to present an apparently 'simple' style may require to be fairly highly developed. In terms of bowing style alone, John Grant, as can be seen in illustrations 1 and 2, makes use of the whole length of the bow, allowing a greater variety of bow-strokes than that of Charlie Bremner, who uses only the upper half of the bow, and his phrasing is rather more varied than that of Bremner. Alec Grant, too, may be regarded as having a 'complex' bowing style closer to John Grant than to Bremner, whereas John Lindsay falls somewhere between the two poles, and John Ferguson is closer to Bremner.

The Smith's a Gallant Fireman again provides an opportunity to compare the bowing styles of three fiddlers: John Grant, John Lindsay and Charlie Bremner.

'...You're supposed to lift your bow in strathspeys  
...you'll have to pull it from end to end...'  
(John Grant)

These remarks describe John Grant's bowing style more than adequately. In The Smith, his characteristic 'lifting' of the bow off the string is much in evidence. The transcription (fig. 16) gives a detailed annotation of his bowing in the first playing of the tune (before the repeat).

Points where the bow is 'lifted' are underlined, and it can be seen that: (a) the 'lift' occurs in each of the four lines of the



Illustrations 1 and 2. John Grant's Bowing Style.

FIG. 16

Tape No: SA1973/144

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM ♩ = c184

Handwritten musical score for 'The Smith's a Gallant Fireman'. The score is written on four staves, each beginning with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and slurs, indicating a complex melodic and rhythmic structure. The first staff contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The third staff shows a more varied melodic line with some longer note values. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase. The handwriting is clear and legible, typical of a professional musical manuscript.

An empty musical staff consisting of five horizontal lines, intended for additional notation or a second part of the music.

A second empty musical staff, identical to the first, consisting of five horizontal lines.

FIG.17

Tape No: SA1973/145

Title: The Smith's aGallant Fireman

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tomintoul

Performer: John Lindsay

Coll:

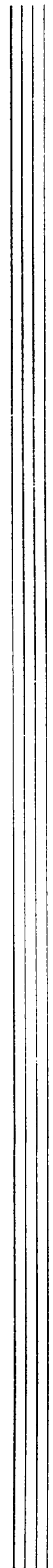
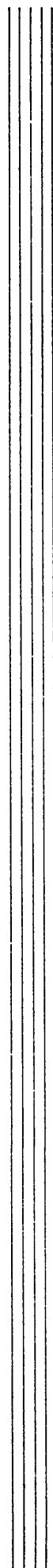
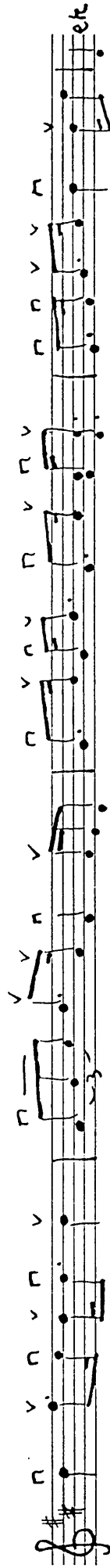
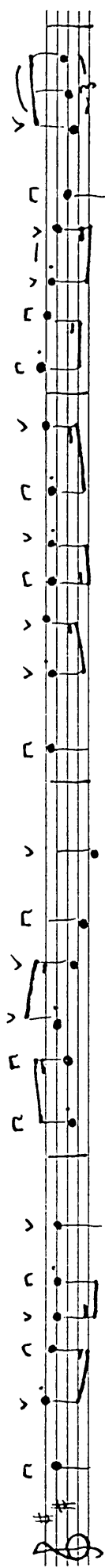
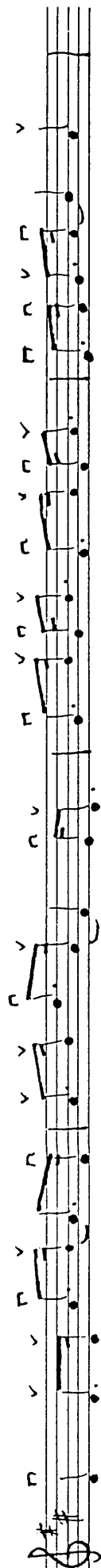
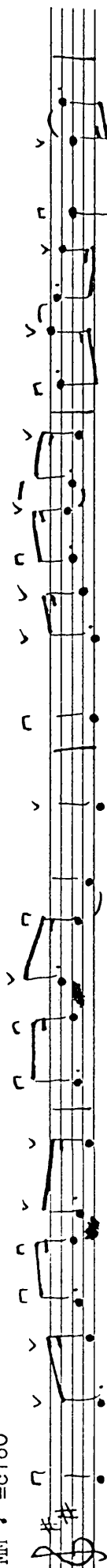
Trans:


MM ♩ = c138

Area: Glenlivet  
MEI: c160

Performer: Charlie Bremner


Coll: H. Henderson Trans H.M.

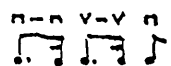
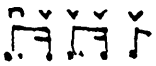


tune on the figure , and

(b) the 'lift' becomes progressively less marked as the piece progresses, so that by the fourth line the phrasing is less consciously assertive, more 'legato'. The same effect can be heard in the repeat of the tune (not transcribed).

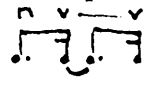
John Lindsay's performance (fig. 17) is even more 'detached' in phrasing, and the bow is lifted on almost all of the rhythmic units

 . Unlike John Grant, John Lindsay does not use the whole extent of the bow and produces a more regular rhythmic pulse.

In both of these examples the bowing sequences are similar where the 'lift' in dotted rhythms occurs. The characteristic sequence is one which is generally accepted as one of the hallmarks of the Scots ~~figure~~ <sup>fiddler</sup> traditional ~~figure~~ and bears a direct relationship to the 'up-bow' sequence noted earlier in this chapter - a continuous down or up-bow sequence as follows:  . Here the bow separates the two notes of the dotted rhythm unit while travelling in the same direction. The up-bow version of this (as attributed to Niel Gow), which is used especially by many schooled players of today, is often rather more complex:  - with three or even more successive up-strokes. The evidence of Speyside informants shows, however, that there, at least, the sequence is almost always of the simpler kind among unschooled players. It can be seen in John Grant's Smith's a Gallant Fireman in bars 1-2 and at other corresponding points in the tune. Similarly, John Lindsay's performance makes considerable use of these continuous-direction bowing sequences.

The third performance of The Smith's a Gallant Fireman (fig. 18), by Charlie Bremner, shows a rather different stylistic approach. In playing the strathspey in a way which is no less regular in rhythmic



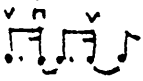
pulse than that of John Lindsay, Bremner at the same time makes no attempt to employ the degree of 'lift' characteristic of the other two performances. Indeed his performance might be said to be closer to a slow hornpipe than to a strathspey in that the relationship between dotted quaver and semiquaver is almost that of two to three rather than the three to one or even seven to one found in the other two performances. In fact, as can be seen from the bowing transcription, his bowing sequences are in some ways similar to those of Grant and Lindsay, with some use of continuous-direction sequences at the same points in the tune. However, he slurs notes much more frequently, especially from semiquaver to succeeding quaver thus: . This can be seen in bars 3 and 6, for example. On the other hand, 'snap' rhythmic units are most often played (as in bar 7) with separate strokes, though at the end of bars 4 and 16 they are slurred in a single up-stroke. Up-stroke slurs are similarly used by John Grant and John Lindsay to play these snap-units at the end of bars 2, 6, 10 and 14, thus ensuring a down-bow on the following 'strong' beat. The most significant feature of Bremner's bowing style, however, is the absence of 'lift', the concern with a continuously flowing melodic line.

Bayard<sup>101</sup> found, in Pennsylvania, that bowing styles varied from one individual to another as much as any other aspect of style, and he noticed that players either had 'a sense of phrasing or its absence'. It is not clear what he means by 'a sense of phrasing' and whether its existence or absence is determined by his own criteria or those of his informants. It would perhaps be more objective to regard 'phrasing' as a matter of interpretation on which the informant's judgement is

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<sup>101</sup> Bayard, op. cit., p. 18.

of most interest. The above three examples display widely differing kinds of phrasing, and if 'phrasing' is a term used to describe the ways in which notes are grouped into units (by various means of emphasis, modes of attack, dynamics, etc.), then it cannot be said that 'phrasing' could be absent from the performances. These three examples suggest, rather, that, among unschooled players, 'phrasing' and (as an important component of it) bowing-style are primarily individual and only secondarily part of a shared tradition.

Further examples, while offering no conclusive proof of this generalisation (a very large sample of many performances would be required to provide such proof), nevertheless strongly suggest it to be true in Speyside. Alec Grant and John Grant,<sup>102</sup> for example, adopt distinctly different approaches to bowing and phrasing in The Laird o Drumblair, despite the fact that both claim to know and emulate the style of the same source performance - the disc recording of Scott Skinner. In fact, Alec Grant's version is much the closer of the two to Skinner's recording in phrasing and bowing style, perhaps the most striking similarity being the 'slurring' of semiquaver to dotted quaver in bar 2, thus:  . Skinner marks this bowing in 'The Scottish Violinist' (p. 10), but it is also quite obviously present in his recorded performance. Again the continuous-direction bowing sequence is used by both performers, as is a certain amount of 'lift' between dotted quaver and semiquaver, though this is again more apparent in John Grant's version, but John Grant gives a performance which is generally more aggressively detached in phrasing - an impression which is aided by his faster tempo.

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<sup>102</sup>

Examples 1 and 11.

As I have said, the playing of John Ferguson, of Carrbridge, falls more or less into the 'simple' stylistic category with Charlie Bremner, and The Devil in the Kitchen (Ex. 12) is an example of his playing which, though considerably removed from the more 'cultivated' sound of Bremner, illustrates the point. The rhythmic pulse is again very regular and only the top half of the bow is used with a tendency to place particular emphasis on the down-bow. The continuous-direction bow-sequence is used comparatively little (though this tune does not, in any case, allow its use as much as some others) and then almost exclusively on the first beat of bars where the rhythmic unit is the dotted quaver/semiquaver one. Lifting the bow off the string is not an important feature of this style of playing, though at points where continuous-direction bowing sequences are indicated the two notes of the rhythmic unit are clearly detached. This is one aspect of bowing style, however, which one might expect to change or diminish with old age, and it would be unwise not to take this factor into account in the case of John Ferguson, who was over eighty at the time of the recording.

Further examination of transcriptions of strathspey performances by John Grant reveals a bowing style which is entirely consistent with the picture that emerges from the two performances already discussed. The distinctive features of his style that emerged in the above description are to be found, for example, in Maggie Cameron (Ex. 5) and The Brig o Perth (Ex. 3) as well as in Craigellachie Bridge. John Grant uses Maggie Cameron, indeed, to illustrate the 'pull' and 'lift' of his bowing style:

'A lot o them slur the tunes - ye know, take it

out wi their fingers. They don't use their bow.  
 I bow it...I pull the bow...that's the way Skinner  
 used to do. You're supposed to lift your bow in  
 strathspeys...lift it up...off your [strings]...  
 to get a better tone...' (App. 1, p.201)

In Maggie Cameron he 'lifts' his bow as in the previous examples, on dotted-quaver/semiquaver rhythmic units (e.g. bars 2, 4 and 6), using continuous-direction up or down bowings. In Craigellachie Bridge (Ex. 4) this detached bowing is reserved for the repeat of the first section (bar 5) though the actual bowing sequences seem to be the same in both parts. In The Brig o Ferth, however, the 'lift' is used in the first section (bars 1, 2, etc.) but much less so in the repeat, which is played relatively 'legato'. Craigellachie Bridge would seem to be fairly exceptional, then, among John Grant's strathspey performances in that he usually prefers to establish what he would call the 'kick' or 'life' of the piece by using this detached bowing style at the beginning, less so in the repeat.

In Maggie Cameron John Grant carries this tendency towards an aggressively bowed opening even further, 'lifting' between the four 'snap' rhythmic units of the first bar which he treats as four separate crotchets (the snaps being slurred with the fingers) or, rather, as separate quavers - such is the length of the gaps between them.

It is common, in ethnomusicological analyses, to regard the beginning of a performance as to some degree suspect - especially in instrumental performances where it is often assumed that the performance only 'settles down' after it has got well past the opening. It is true that, because of nervousness or some other factor related to the fact that the informant is being subjected to unaccustomed scrutiny away from his normal performance situation, there can often be inaccuracies which would not normally appear. But researchers have

sometimes completely ignored the beginning of a performance for these reasons. As we have seen in the case of John Grant, the opening bars of these strathspey examples are usually quite distinctive in style and, to some extent (though this should not be exaggerated), they provide us with important characteristics of his bowing style.

## Chapter 7

## IRREGULAR-PULSE RHYTHMIC STYLE

Of all the innumerable descriptions of the so-called 'elements' of musical style and structure in ethnomusicological writing, the one which so far seems to have attracted least attention is tempo - and especially what is called in European 'art' music tempo rubato. The problem of describing the tempo of a piece of music has been approached in various ways by scholars like Sachs and A. M. Jones and, more recently, by Kolinski and Christensen, but very little research has been carried out on the subject of rubato, or what we may call 'variable tempo' or 'non-metrical rhythmic style'.

103

The Harvard Dictionary defines rubato as

'an elastic, flexible tempo involving slight accelerandos and ritardandos that alternate according to the requirements of musical expression.'

Others have described rubato in terms of 'robbing' and 'paying back' of musical time, but that essentially 19th century application of the term is of questionable relevance in traditional fiddle playing. Neither of these definitions is quite explicit enough to be useful in the present context and certainly the word 'rubato' has too many unwanted associations with 'art' music. I prefer, therefore, to adopt a more neutral term which might at the same time be more exactly descriptive of the phenomenon in Scots fiddle-playing. The term 'variable tempo' is in itself not inaccurate as a descriptive term, since, seen as fluctuations in an average (for the whole piece)

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<sup>103</sup>W. Apel, ed., op. cit.

metronomic tempo, these irregularities do, indeed, have the effect of transient tempo changes. However, as Dieter Christensen<sup>104</sup> has pointed out:

'The fact that a metronomic indication does not suffice for a characterisation of tempo has been pointed out several times in recent years. If the Maelzel metronome is used, a rational meter must be assured to be present. Fermatas, caesuras and irregularities of tempo cannot be measured properly by such a method.'

And Christensen posits an 'Inner Tempo' for which the formula:

$$\frac{\text{No. of notes} \times 60}{\text{duration in seconds}}$$

gives a tempo indication which takes account of internal fluctuations.

However, such explanations of the concept of 'tempo' must inevitably regard the piece as a whole or as a combination of clearly definable sections, so that transient irregularities of tempo, though accounted for, are not described in themselves. One is forced, therefore, to detach them from the 'tempo' concept and to find some other frame of reference.

The question is more readily related to 'pulse' and the variability of the distances in time between pulses. The definition of 'pulse' would itself be difficult in the musics of many cultures, but in the case of Scots dance music, the definition poses no problem, since it is dependent on the dance structure: the 'pulse' is the 'beat' which marks the close of each step in the dance. In the strathspey, for example, it is simply the initial attack of each of the four crotchet beats in the bar. Thus I prefer to define the phenomenon as irregular-pulse rhythmic style.

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<sup>104</sup>D. Christensen, Inner Tempo and Melodic Tempo, in Ethnomusicology, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Middletown, 1960), pp. 9-14.

It would seem that this aspect of style in Speyside is found mainly in strathspey playing and, to a lesser extent, in march playing. Again, I shall concentrate, therefore, on strathspey playing, particularly the playing of John Grant, in whose performances irregular-pulse rhythmic style is especially marked.

John Grant, and to some extent Alec Grant, are unusual among the unschooled players of the Spey Valley in their tendency to play many of the strathspeys and some marches in their repertoire in an irregular-pulse rhythmic style. Indeed it is a stylistic feature which one would tend to associate with schooled fiddlers, and particularly in the playing of slow strathspeys - the recital or 'listening' pieces which are not intended for use in the dance hall. The influence of Scott Skinner may have some bearing on the style, and the phenomenon can be heard in the recorded performances of Skinner himself. Whether it was an innovation of Skinner is doubtful. Indeed, while there appears to be no reference in print to this specific trait - from which one might deduce its existence within the style of late 18th and 19th century traditional players - it seems likely that slow strathspeys would have been well suited to the 'tempo rubato' styles that became part of performance practice in the 'art' music of the period. Such was the influence of the violinist upon the fiddler in the time of the Gows and later in the 19th century, that it would not be surprising if slow strathspeys came to be played in this way.<sup>105</sup>

Irregular-pulse rhythmic style is not, however, confined solely to slow strathspey playing, even among schooled fiddlers. Hector

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<sup>105</sup>Collinson (op. cit., p. 214) attributes the 'invention' of the slow strathspey to Niel Gow, saying that they are played 'in a characteristic and peculiarly detached staccato fashion', but does not give evidence to show that they were played thus in Gow's time.



'cAndrew's performance of Craigellachie Bridge (Ex. 17) illustrates its use in a strathspey played at a dance tempo. Here the fluctuations in pulse speed are quite small, but nevertheless clearly audible without the aid of a 'proportional spacing' transcription. It is possible, too, that the piano accompaniment imposes some degree of control over the pulse and that without it the amount of fluctuation would be greater.

Slow strathspeys do not form part of the repertoire of John or Alec Grant, or, in general, of most unschooled players (although Craigellachie Bridge, which is in John Grant's repertoire, is sometimes rendered in a 'slow strathspey' style by schooled players). Indeed, John Grant plainly regards slow strathspeys as in some way inferior to his ideal of the strathspey as essentially a dance tune:

'Skinner never played a strathspey like a solo, like a Slow Air - he played it that you could do the Highland Fling to it. Oh, he might play... slow strathspeys...different to one for dancin' time...' (App. 1, p.196)

John Grant's remark is another typical example of the way in which Skinner is used by unschooled fiddlers (and by many schooled fiddlers) as a stylistic ideal against which performances can be measured and compared. Mr. Grant incidentally voices another of the differences in attitude towards repertoire and style between the unschooled and schooled fiddler, for his rather dismissive opinion of the 'slow strathspey' contrasts with the usual position of slow strathspey among schooled fiddlers as the most exacting test of skill.

106

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<sup>106</sup> <sup>quoted</sup> Slow strathspeys (and slow airs) are ~~described~~ by Peter Cooke as <sup>being</sup> ~~considered~~ 'an essential part of the Scottish fiddler's repertoire', (op. cit., p. 7). This comment, I would suggest, refers primarily to the schooled fiddler.

### The 'Folk View'

As with so many aspects of fiddle style, the 'folk view' of irregular-pulse rhythmic style is not particularly helpful as an aid to understanding why the fiddler plays as he does and what are the criteria, musical and otherwise, that determine the way he plays. But the 'folk view', in that it tells us something about the way the musicians regard their own music-making and that of others, is interesting and itself useful in demonstrating which parts of the musical aesthetic are articulated and which, because they may be unconscious, are not.

It must be stated that most fiddlers I interviewed on this subject were unable to talk about it at all - either because they had not noticed it in the playing of fiddlers whose style they knew well, and therefore found it difficult to isolate it as a topic capable of discussion, or because they associated it with a kind of playing different from their own; their experience of it was largely through broadcasts or concerts by schooled fiddlers of the 'establishment' of Scots fiddling, whose playing they could certainly admire but could not analyse on such a detailed level. Because these players were 'high-class' (a term used by John Grant) they tended to identify them primarily with a musical world to which they themselves could not attain and to regard them with an admiration which, perhaps because it was uncritical, more or less precluded an analytical approach by which elements of style could be separated out for comment. John Grant was unusual among the Speyside fiddlers in his critical approach to the playing of well-known present-day fiddlers, but even his comments were invariably couched in terms of comparison with Skinner - about whose playing he is quite uncritical.

The following comments of Willie Fraser of Aberlour <sup>107</sup>(a noted mouth-organ player who played the fiddle before an accident deprived him of some of the fingers of his right hand) are fairly typical of the unschooled player's association of the irregular-pulse rhythmic style with 'solo' (i.e. 'slow') strathspeys and the schooled 'concert' fiddler:

W.F.: 'You wouldna hear the like o, say...Skinner...very seldom ever played...occasionally he did...play like that...ye ken it's a kind o flowery way o pushin a strathspey. I think it's just...a method o playin that somebody's introduced...'

P.C.: For dancing to, or...?

W.F.: No, no - for playin solo...just to mak it...sound different ye see.'

Willie Fraser, therefore, concurs with John Grant's statement quoted above, that Skinner is not, for him, associated with this style of playing except in the exceptional case of the slow strathspey - and, at the same time, implies that this 'flowery way' of playing is beyond his province as a musician who sees the strathspey as essentially a dance-form and as inseparable from the requirements (especially of rhythm and tempo) of the dance.

However, it may be that the irregular-pulse style as it appears in the slow strathspey playing of schooled fiddlers is in some way different from the phenomenon which is part of the style of John Grant and other fiddlers who play strathspeys 'for dancing'. Both John Grant and Willie Fraser suggest that some dance tunes must of necessity be performed with some degree of rhythmic flexibility (although this flexibility may have only a small effect on the regularity of the pulse, being effective within the rhythmic unit that occupies each

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<sup>107</sup> SA 1973/149B. Interviewed by Peter Cooke and H.M.

pulse unit). John Grant, for example, maintains that some tunes, like Craigellachie Bridge, must be played at a slower tempo than others for reasons of technical difficulty:

'...you can't play that heavy tunes, you know they're very heavy. You can't play that tunes fast.' (App. 1, p. )

And Willie Fraser is more explicit with reference to this tune in particular:

'...in Craigellachie Brig there's [diddles]



see? It's awfu difficult to follow that. If you're going to go into strict-time, ye're hammerin like the clappers on that runs...' 108

Again the reason given for this kind of rhythmic irregularity is technical difficulty: the semiquaver 'runs' which figure prominently in many strathspeys by William Marshall and Scott Skinner are seen as requiring some degree of freedom of rhythm because of the difficulty of their execution, though this is an 'unschooled' view which might not be shared by the schooled fiddler with greater technical facility in such matters.



But this kind of 'holding back' of a tune is, for these fiddlers, not the same as the 'flowery way o pushin' the strathspey that Willie Fraser has noticed in the playing of certain well-known fiddlers. And it is here that we must adopt a 'folk'-term for irregular-pulse rhythmic style - a word which in fact conveys its essence more eloquently - 'lilt'.

The word 'lilt' is the one favoured by John Grant:

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<sup>108</sup> SA 1273/149B. Liddled example from the beginning of varied repeat of Craigellachie Bridge.

'Well Skinner...he plays his tunes wi a good lilt  
- a lilt, ye know. And the other ones is too dead,  
I would say.'

The word 'lilt' seems to cover many aspects of playing style for John Grant, including the desirability of 'lifting the bow' already discussed; and indeed the example he gives (see App. 1, p.196 for this transcription) to illustrate the meaning of the term is, though related, not specifically referring to irregular-pulse rhythmic style, but to a way of playing the rhythmic unit  in the Laird o Drumblair which corresponds in its flexibility towards the length of the three notes (thus: ) to Willie Fraser's example from Craigellachie Bridge. Nevertheless, the use of the word is justified in the present context by the fact that Mr. Grant and other fiddlers do use it to refer to irregular-pulse playing - and, though it can cover other aspects of style it would be wrong to expect such a term to have a more specialised use among fiddlers.

### The transcriptions

In order to examine the 'lilt' in some examples of strathspeys played by John Grant, I have made use of the 'time-signal' method of transcription. This method allows one to make a visual representation of the time-distance between individual melody notes in the performance by means of manuscript paper on which vertical lines are superimposed on the usual staves. These thin vertical lines are equally spaced and grouped in tens with a thicker line at the first of every ten. The lines correspond to a high-pitched time-signal which is superimposed on to the recorded performance at the rate of ten 'bleeps' per second, so that the length of each melody note can be charted with a high degree of accuracy. It should be emphasised that the placing

of the lines in relation to the melody is purely arbitrary, the thick lines having no significance as bar-lines or as indications of accent or stress; they are merely a convenient method of locating the beginning of every group of ten (they correspond to a louder 'bleep' on the time-signal recording) during the process of transcribing the piece.

I have chosen three examples from among strathspeys which John Grant plays most often, and have included part of a march (as well as part of a march performance by Alec Grant) to show that the lilt is not confined solely to strathspey playing. It must be admitted that the range of examples is small, a fact necessitated by the unfortunately very slow, time-consuming nature of this type of transcription. This discussion cannot, therefore, offer conclusive evidence on the nature of irregular-pulse rhythmic style, but is rather intended as a preliminary study of the phenomenon - one which, it appears, has so far attracted very little, if any, attention in ethnomusicological research.

As I have said, the degree of irregularity in pulse in John and Alec Grant's playing is small - much smaller than one would find in slow strathspey playing - therefore, the possibility of error in transcription is likely to be greater and the significance of very small variations in note-length much less. I shall therefore regard differences of note-length of one-tenth of a second or less as too small to be of relevance.

Firstly, it must be said that the tune itself is likely to be an important determinant factor on the degree to which the fiddler uses a 'lilting' style in its performance and on the particular parts of the tune in which he uses it more or less. The tune itself, for

example, dictates the kinds of bowing sequences to be used (that is, within the terms of the individual fiddler's own bowing style) and it prescribes the sequences of rhythmic units which the fiddler must use. These units may themselves have some prescriptive role as regards the length of their individual melody notes, some types of rhythmic unit lending themselves more readily to lengthening or shortening of note values than others. All these factors, which may result from a combination of many causes, musical, physical, emotional, etc., could have a bearing on the rhythmic style of the individual tune. For that reason it would seem impossible to compare tune-performances as whole units in the present context, though one might draw some useful statistical conclusions from a very large sample of performances. It would clearly be impossible to conclude, for example, that a particular fiddler tends to lengthen the third beat of the fourth bar in his strathspey performances, since the phrase and rhythmic structure of individual strathspeys can vary so much. It would be more fruitful, I would suggest, to discuss 'lilt' in terms of the fiddler's treatment of much smaller units.

If we take John Grant's performance of Maggie Cameron (Ex. 5) - one of the most prominent strathspeys in his repertoire - as a basic example of his irregular-pulse rhythmic style, we can begin by noting some general (and fairly obviously audible) features. The time-signal transcription of the first playing of the complete tune (fig. 19) shows that:

(a) John Grant begins the strathspey at a slower tempo, moving into a slightly faster tempo during the second line. The same is true of the two other strathspey examples shown here (figs. 20 and 21) - The Brig o Perth and Craigellachie Bridge. Alec Grant's performance

Fig.19 MAGGIE CAMERON John Grant SA 974/248

TITLE

1. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 7, 5, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 7, 4, 4, 6, 5, 5, 5

2. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4

3. 4, 3, 4, 4, 2, 5, 5, 5, 3, 3, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, 2, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 3, 4, 3, 4, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$

4. 6, 5, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, 3, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 3, 3, 4, 4, 2, 3, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 4, 3, 4, etc.



Fig.20 THE BRIG O PERTH John Grant SA1973/147

TITLE

2nd turning etc.

Fig.21 CRAIGELLACHIE BRIDGE John Grant SA1974/246

TITLE

etc.

Fig.22 THE BALMORAL HIGHLANDERS Alec Grant SA1973/141

TITLE

2nd turning etc

Fig.23 THE ARGYLLSHIRE GATHERING John Grant SA1973/149

etc

of the march The Balmoral Highlanders (fig. 22) follows the same pattern, though the tempo accelerates to a slightly faster level (which is maintained, with internal fluctuations, for the rest of the performance) somewhat earlier. John Grant's performance of the march The Argyllshire Gathering (fig. 23), however, is much more uniform in overall tempo, and the first two bars are only very fractionally slower than the rest of the performance.

(b) The most extreme fluctuations in pulse occur, in Waggie Cameron, during the first two bars (i.e. the first eight pulses or 'beats'); these are not necessarily so marked at the equivalent points in the repeat of the whole tune (not shown in the transcription) though in this particular tune the repeat is a melodic variant and therefore not strictly comparable. The same can be said for The Brig o Perth: here again, while the fluctuations are relatively large in the first two bars, the corresponding repeat of these (at bars 3 and 4) shows hardly any significant irregularity of pulse. In Craigellachie Bridge, Mr. Grant adopts a slower overall tempo (in keeping with its being, for him, a 'heavy' tune) and the pattern is rather different: while the opening two bars are certainly slower than the remainder of the tune, the repeat of these bars, though a little faster, shows proportionally similar irregularities from pulse to pulse. In Alec Grant's Balmoral Highlanders the pattern follows that of the strathspey examples with the obvious fluctuations occurring within the first four bars (eight pulses) and the tempo being much more evenly maintained (again with smaller internal fluctuations) in the rest of the first 'strain'.

(c) John Grant has a tendency to play the second half of the tune (i.e. the 'high turning', where the melody moves up on to the E string) at a slightly faster tempo than the first half, again beginning a

little slower and speeding up after the initial three or four pulses. This can be seen in Maggie Cameron and, to a smaller degree, in The Brig o Perth and in Craigellachie Bridge. Alec Grant does not quicken the tempo significantly in the 'high turning' of The Balmoral Highlanders, but he does 'hold back' on the first two pulses.

From these three general observations it can be said that, in the irregular-pulse rhythmic style of John Grant, the opening phase of the tune, and to some extent the beginnings of other important sections of the structure of the piece (e.g. the 'high turning') are given particular importance. At the beginning of the tune there is a deliberate 'holding back' (and this can be heard in most, if not all, of the strathspeys in his repertoire) of which Mr. Grant says:

'It's a longer bow on the first one [note] - aye, well, that's what makes your tune, eh...takes it out...better - I think anyway...' (App. 1, p.198)

The first note (i.e. the first beat of the opening bar) and its anacrusis are indeed held longer than other notes in the piece in most of John Grant's strathspey performances, and in the examples shown here it will be noted that the first beats are roughly twice the length of the average length of beats later in the piece. This practice may well stem from necessity in playing for dancing where a lengthened up-beat can be useful in helping less experienced dancers to place the first step. A slightly lengthened 'down beat' would be a natural corollary of this, so that the tempo could be gradually established over the first two or three pulses when clearly a sudden quickening of speed would tend to confuse the dancers. This holding back of the first beat, however, may be a little more pronounced in the performances transcribed here, since the constraints of accompanying the dance are absent.

The lengthening of pulses at other points in the course of a strathspey performance is more difficult to describe, since the pattern appears more arbitrary, and perhaps more dependant on the nature of the rhythmic unit played on a particular pulse. The lengthening of the first down-beat seems to happen almost invariably in John Grant's playing, whatever the rhythmic unit that falls on that beat. And, though the 'snap' rhythm does not occur on the first beat of any of the examples I have cited here, it can be heard as a lengthened initial down-beat in recorded strathspey examples such as Alec Grant's George the IVth.<sup>109</sup>

A closer examination shows that, in detail, each of the four main examples transcribed has its own irregular pulse patterns which can be itemised as follows:

Maggie Cameron. In the first half of the tune, there are two basic melodic elements, A (the first bar, consisting of the crotchet followed by three accentuated crotchets with snap rhythm), and B (the second bar consisting of a 'rocking' triadic shape in dotted quaver rhythms plus a fourth beat acting as an anacrusis to the succeeding phrase), and these, repeated once, make up the melodic and rhythmic structure of the first, or 'low', turning. John Grant gives element B the pulse length: long, short, short, (long) the first and second times (bars 2 and 4) and the third time (bar 6), though here the last beat of the bar is short as the tempo increases. The fourth time, the tempo is moving towards the slightly faster speed of the second turning so that the sequence comes out of phase. There is a tendency, then, to lengthen the dotted quaver in this first half of the tune and it should be noted that the lowing sequence for these rhythmic

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<sup>109</sup> SA1973/141.

units is here the continuous direction slur (up or down).

Apart from the lengthening of the dotted quavers on the first three pulses of the 'high turning' it is difficult to isolate rhythmic patterns in the second half of the tune, though one can detect a tendency, from the pulse lengths, to increase speed towards the end of every four-beat phrase so that there is a certain precipitous feeling in the progress of the performance to the repeat.

The Brig o Perth. Again we find that John Grant tends to lengthen the dotted quavers, though not always using continuous-direction bowing. The bowing sequence may, in fact, have an important part to play here: clearly lengthened dotted quavers such as that on the fourth beat of bar 1, and the slightly lengthened one on the third beat of bar 2 could be, in part at least, a product of the bowing sequences that preceded them. Thus, it can be seen from the bowing indications in bar 1 that the predominance of down-bow strokes, with only two short up-bows in the first three beats, necessitates a longer up-bow on the fourth beat to avoid running out of bow. The same is true of the second example in bar 2. Another example occurs on the second beat of bar 8.

Craigellachie Bridge. An interesting feature of John Grant's performance of this tune is his treatment of the downward-running group of four semiquavers - a characteristic of many tunes by William Marshall. It can be seen from the transcription that, at most occurrences of this semiquaver group in the tune, he lengthens the last of the four (a fact that is clearly audible in the recording). The bowing sequence shows that he uses an up-bow on this note and its lengthening is probably again a matter of necessity, to some extent.

However, this lengthening is also somewhat akin musically to his lengthening of the third quaver in the triplet groups of The Laird o Drumblair which he himself quoted when discussing the meaning of 'lilt' (App. 1, p.196) and which he ascribes to Skinner's own playing style. With respect to Craigellachie Bridge, Willie Fraser, having asserted his opinion that the 'lilting' style is a comparatively recent development, at least in its more exaggerated form; was questioned about William Marshall's own playing style:

H.M.: 'It would be interesting to know if his own playing style was like that...

W.F.: I doubt it. Cos he was a fussy mannie, an I dinna think he woulda played that way if he was that fussy. And he was an engineer which meant that... he had a mathematical mind...so I dinna think... that he woulda ~~did~~ that - but he might ha deen, I don't know.' <sup>110</sup>


Hector McAndrew lengthens the final semiquaver considerably (Ex. 17), and, indeed, he presents it as a prominent feature of the tune, especially in the varied repeat. We may wonder whether there would be grounds for regarding this feature as a recognised part of the rhythmic structure of Craigellachie Bridge among schooled fiddlers; it is quite likely that John Grant may have learned the style from broadcasts of McAndrew or other schooled fiddlers. Certainly, Craigellachie Bridge is less commonly found in the repertoire of unschooled players, and its performance style, in common with that of many of the tunes of Marshall, is dominated by the 'schooled' part of the tradition. This evidence in John Grant's playing of the influence of the schooled fiddler's style, though too small to be of more than marginal importance, is

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<sup>110</sup>SA 1973/149A.

nevertheless an interesting example of the possibility of the transmission of even the subtlest aspects of style.

The Balmoral Highlanders. Apart from the opening four beats of the first half of the tune, and the beginning of the 'high turning', Alec Grant's performance is, in keeping with the whole idea of a march, not notably irregular in pulse, like John Grant's version of The Argyllshire Gathering, but the lilt, though slight, is discernible and the transcription shows that a regular pattern of small pulse variation continues through the performance. It is clear that, from bar 2 to the end of the first half, the second (i.e. the 'unaccented') beat of the bar is almost always slightly longer than the first. The same is true of the beginning of the 'high turning', after the first bar, where both dotted quavers are considerably lengthened. An examination of the bowing patterns shows that almost all of these slightly lengthened second beats occur on up-bows.

At least three of the examples described above (The Balmoral Highlanders, Craigellachie Bridge and The Brig o Perth) demonstrate the significance of bowing-style in relation to the 'lilt' of these two players. The up-bow, in particular, would seem to play an important part in irregular-pulse rhythmic style, especially in the lengthening of the dotted quaver where it appears at the beginning of the two-note rhythmic unit  . Given a large sample (perhaps six performances each by ten players) of transcriptions using the time-signal method, it should be possible to produce a more detailed account of the 'norms' of irregular-pulse rhythmic style, though an area more stylistically homogeneous than Strathspey might produce a greater consensus.



The small number of examples described here do, however, give us a more complete account of one Speyside fiddler's rhythmic style than would be possible without time-signal transcriptions, and help to reveal something of the meaning of the many-faceted word 'lilt' - a word used by so many fiddlers.

This chapter can only be a preliminary study of one aspect of rhythmic style in Scots fiddle-playing, but more detailed research is undoubtedly necessary to a fuller understanding of it. The 'deep-structure' of fiddle style, if it contains the stylistic awareness which provides a player with a system of aesthetic values which determine the way in which he presents the tune, must also comprise a physical dimension, which, for example, determines the way in which the fiddler uses his bow. We do not know how much a physical 'at-oneness' with his bow and his fiddle influences the way he plays - how much, for example, a lengthened up-bow owes to the physical satisfaction the player has in a particular arm and body movement. Until more research is done into these and other areas which make up the material of 'style', the purely musical information can only be a beginning to its fuller understanding.

## Appendix 1

## A FIDDLER IN STRATHSPEY

## SOUND PORTRAIT

This appendix consists of a complete transcript of the edited conversations which make up the 'sound-portrait' of John Grant of Tulloch, as presented on Track A of the Example Tape. The interviews are interspersed with music examples, and those which have not been transcribed here will be found, complete or in part, under the appropriate Example Number in Appendix 2.

As explained in the Introduction, the sound portrait has been arranged to run in parallel, as a commentary, with the text of the dissertation. The interviews were conducted informally at John Grant's house in the course of three visits.

Because of the fact that weather conditions and other circumstances were different on each occasion, it was impossible to maintain a constant recording level. Recordings made at night were particularly affected by this, since John Grant's only source of light is a rather noisy spirit lamp - and this accounts for a certain amount of background hiss in certain sections.

The following tapes were the source of all interview material:

SA 1973/144	SA 1974/248
SA 1973/147	SA 1974/249
SA 1974/246	SA 1974/251
SA 1974/247	

A list of repertoire recorded by John Grant appears in Appendix 1a.

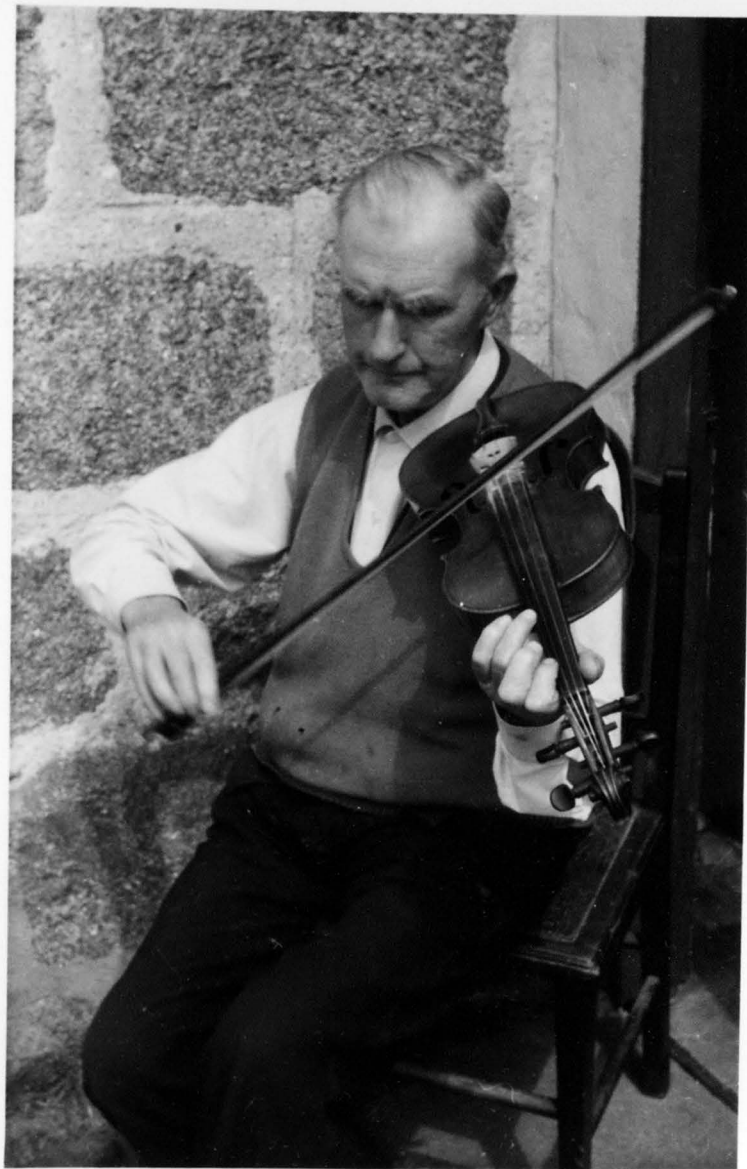


Illustration 3. John Grant, Tulloch.

## Part 1

## LEARNING

First Steps

JG First tune I played was a psalm-tune.

HM ... and which... which tune was that, d'you remember?

JG It was... eh... The Lord's My Shepherd...

I was goin at that one first.

HM How long would it be before you got it?

JG Och, I got it in a night or two...

HM Did you...

JG ... here...

HM ... and then what was your first?

JG I could play the scale when I lifted it first  
 ... after my father... eh... gave it up here.  
 Well he... when I was wee he showed me how to play  
 the scale... when I was little...  
 but I never... I never played tunes in that...  
 in he's time.  
 But he showed me how to do the scale an  
 I never forgot it.  
 An then when I went in for it right, I said,  
 och, I think I'll... I'll keep on at the... eh...  
 slow music.  
 I was gettin better on at the slow ones, ye see,  
 an I said, och - on a Sunday there... ma  
 mother, they... oh she used tae go tae church  
 from here.  
 An I said, I'll try psalms, ye see... she...  
 she was a grand singer. She was a good  
 singer - cos I'd... I'd got the music from  
 both sides...  
 Ma mother was good - an ma father was good

- An maither grandfather could play too - her father
- HM Aye - oh, he could play, too?
- JG He could play too and the whole... the whole lot that's in the...
- I got music from every side ye see.
- HM Now, when you started to play the fiddle, how did you learn to tune it first?
- JG Oh, well... eh... I got A. That's in yer ear again.
- HM You got the A?
- JG Aye, that's yer ear.
- HM And did you know how to do... do the strings ... when you...
- JG Oh, grand! (laughs) When I got the A... ye must correspond the E wi the A... an it must be... ye... ye must have a good ear tae tune the fiddle.
- HM Aye, but how did you, how did you find out how to do that?
- JG Oh... ma father had a whadye call't there
- HM A what?
- JG Ye blow intit...
- HM ... oh, I see...
- JG ... an ye get... ye get A...
- HM You get the... the note, yes.
- JG Aye, ye get the... the... ye get A.  
An ye blow the other side ye get E.  
Ye blow one the other side an ye get D an...  
an ye get the whole - the four was in it  
but I never used that much...  
only him. He used tae do it - for he's  
ear couldna've been very good.  
It couldna've been good...
- HM He had to use that did he?
- JG No he had tae use that...

Influences - The Family

HM How did you pick the tunes up when she<sup>111</sup> diddled them to you?

JG Oh... I could p... pick them up grand on... on the fiddle.  
Oh, jist... well I don't... they jist came to me... it  
would...

HM Did she sing along as you were playing?

JG Aye. If she was... if she was... eh... say I wanted  
to learn a strathspey or somethin like that, ye know...  
eh... well, I said you diddle it an I'll play it, ye see.  
An she would keep... keep on diddlin there...  
until I got it... got it right...

an she g... she'd got good time an all ye know, but...

HM Yes. And did she diddle for dancing as well?

JG Oh, she diddled for anything. Eh, anyone that  
wanted tae dance.

HM Did you have dances in the house here?

JG Oh plenty - often...  
in the old days. Mhm. Well there was a lot  
o young... eh... school... scholars, ye know would  
come here - an they would maybe have a go at  
the highland fling and she would diddle for them.

JG ... an I heard ma grandfather playin over there.  
He'd play old tunes too...

d'ye know a tune Loch Leven Castle?

It's a reel - he used to play that ones...  
he was a good p... he was a good player too  
... jist the old style.

HM And was he a very old man when he died?

JG An old man when he died- he was 90.  
An he was blind (coughs) ... he got blind but  
he could play... he could play... when he got  
old.

HM And what was... what was his style of playing like?

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<sup>111</sup>His mother.

JG Oh, jist the old style of playin... the same...  
jist the same way as I play, I think.

### Old McQueen and Skinner

HM And what about the older tunes that...  
JG Well... I jist learned them in ma heid...  
hearin... hearin other lads playin them.  
HM ... hearing your father playing...?  
JG ... oh I heard my father playin a lot there  
HM And who else did you hear playing them?  
JG Oh, eh... round about here there was a John McQueen  
- that old man up I was tellin ye aboot.  
HM Did you learn some tunes from him?  
JG Aye, plenty old tunes, aye... uhuh... he played  
Auchdon House and all that...  
Miss Lyall an... all that old tunes... that time...  
Smith's a Gallant Fireman, an... all that tunes.  
HM Now what about Maggie Cameron - where did you  
learn that tune? Do you remember where you picked  
that one up?  
JG Oh, jist off Skinner here  
HM Oh, you heard him on a record?  
JG I heard him on a record - I play most o them  
off the records... o Skinner's tunes...  
he played Maggie Cameron -  
an he played the same way I play it...  
HM And was that one of his tunes, that he wrote?  
JG No. It's no his tunes. It's a pipe - that's a pipe tune...  
oh, that's pipes...

Maggie Cameron (Ex. 5) followed by The Mason's Apron

### Skinner and the Gramophone

JG I would put him on there - on the gramophone  
and... ye could tone im... ye could take the gramyphone b...  
back... that he c... ye could follow im, he would

play slow... ye know take it back.

HM Oh, you put it at a slower speed?

JG Aye, slower speed... an then that's the way...

HM ... and you learned like that?

JG ... ye'll learn it that l... like anything. That's the way I learned the tune...an

HM ... and you learned the fast bits right...

JG Aye, he was playin slow and... I could follow im.

If I got the tune in ma heid... right, ye know...

I would let im go at it till I jist got it right

in ma heid tae... ye know... and then I would

take the fiddle an I would follow im...

follow... the record... an I would play it wi im, ye see.

An ye would be sure... ye would, ye wouldna miss any bits again, ye see...

oh, ye might miss a note or two, but... ye'd be very

... ye'd be very sure that ye had yer tune.

When I'd be listenin tae him on the records ye see...

I was gettin very near... comin near his style

cos I played after him...

When I was learnin a tune I always put on

the gramophone - an, och, I bought a hunderd

of his records o all his... I was a great...

jist liked Skinner, an I thought he was

the greatest man in the world.

An I would come wi a new record from Grantown, say...

an jist get the gramophone... an put it on...

an then I would get the fiddle when I heard

him two or three times playin it over, ye see,

an then I would start an play wi im.

I was a great...

jist liked Skinner

an I thought he was

the greatest man in the world...



## THE FIDDLER'S WORLD

The Story of The Reel o Tulloch

- JG Well, I heard ma father sayin here that  
... the way it began at... the Mains o Tulloch -  
the Mains o Tulloch's along there, a farm near  
the hillside there.  
An... they gathered there, this clans that  
was there - they gathered there waitin on a  
funeral.
- HM Which clans were they?
- JG Eh... that's what I can't jist tell ye, what  
clans they were. But they were supposed  
tae be waitin on this funeral comin in it...  
they were... they were standin there an... an  
they had tae... he said it was very cold weather,  
or cold - it must ha been in the winter time, some time.  
It was cold an they were... clappin their hands and  
jumpin aboot, an some lads - they st...  
thought they would start tae dance, dance there.  
And... eh... it was supposed tae be that whoever was,  
whoever... whatever man was at the heid o it  
they started a reel...  
on the field - over up there. An they started this reel  
and they called it  
The Reel o Tulloch -  
That's, that's what I heard them sayin here.
- HM But what... was the... bit about the swords  
that you remembered?
- JG Oh, aye, the swords - aye, well...  
that man Grant was ploughin there,  
oh, years and years after that...  
years - I don't know how many years or what...  
what date it was or any o that, but I heard  
himself, Mr. Grant, sayin... the man that owned  
the farm that he was... when he went into

that place he was ploughin there an  
he turned up three or four swords.

HM And would those be the swords that they used  
for the dancing?

JG That's the swords that they had at The  
Reel o Tulloch - so it was supposed tae be right  
that... that was supposed tae be...

HM ... and is it... is it a sword dance, The Reel o Tulloch?

JG No, it's a reel, like a Highland Reel.

HM ... and it's not a sword dance?

JG It's not a sword dance - no, not a sword dance.

HM So why would they have swords there?

JG Well, in, the, in the old days, ... in that old days  
they never went... they never went walkin  
through the hills withoot a sword.  
They'd al... they always cairried a...  
carried a sword wi them... that old men.

The Brig o Perth (Ex. 3) and The Reel o Tulloch (SA 1973/147,  
see Ex. 6)

#### Playing at Dances

JG Oh, they would... they would go on  
tae five o'clock in the mornin... they would  
start... oh well they wouldn't come... all the  
farmers an crofters that was round here,  
they had tae wait... tae feed their cattle and horses  
before they would leave - and they left always about  
nine or ten o'clock.

HM And did they have drink at the...

JG Oh, plenty of it... plenty drink.

HM Did they bring their own, or..?

JG Oh, I think some o them took their own an  
some... there was some... the man that  
was gonna have the d... dance -  
he would have plenty o it too.

But... eh... they'd gallons o... that's  
that old jar out there -  
ye see it out at the g... at the garden out  
- did ye see it? Well that's the lads  
that was full

HM The jars that held the whiskey?

How much wh... whiskey did they hold?

JG That ones? That one had five gallons.

But, eh, I've seen dances in the barn out there.

HM And what kind of dances did they do?

JG Oh, jist the old dances... eh...

HM There wouldn't be a lot of room there, for...

JG In the barn?

Oh, aye. That's a pretty big barn out there.

They had a good few people.

HM Did they do foursomes?

JG Foursomes... an they would do... they would do  
threesomes... threesome reel... they'd be at polkas  
an...

HM Threesome was the one with the hankies?

JG Aye, that's the one wi the hankies. An they would  
be at polkas - an they would do Strip the Willow  
an they would do Petronella... and  
The Flowers of Edinburgh - that's the dances they had  
in that time.

HM Did they do Lancers?

JG Aye, Lancers an quadrilles

HM Quadrilles - and schottisches?

JG An schottisches. That's it - that's about it.

HM And what was the music they had for them -  
was it the fiddle...?

JG Oh, aye - they'd... jist old fiddlers playin...

HM How many fiddlers played at it?

JG I saw two in the barn there

- JG Well, when they took me down tae  
Nethy Bridge, he said you can put any price you want on...
- HM And what was it you got?
- JG I got three pound every night I went there.
- HM For a... for a night?
- But you never got anything in the older days?
- JG Oh, no no - when I... that's when I started  
tae play first, ye mean? No no - ye got nothing.  
There were plenty dances but you... you were jist  
in a great hurry tae get off tae play when ye  
were learnin that time.
- HM And what about weddings, when you played at  
weddings was there any... any payment?
- JG Oh, no - there was nothing at the weddings.  
Oh, ye did it for... jist for... ye werena goin  
tae ask pay at... at the weddins...  
I mean... ye jist did it for the...  
if they asked you tae play at a weddin  
ye did it for the people, for the bride or whoever  
- or the bridegroom or whoever was wantin ye  
tae play for them... but...
- HM Aye, and what about... if you were playing at a  
wedding or at a dance - there would be more  
than one fiddler... sometimes
- JG Oh - oh sometimes, maybe two, maybe three...
- HM And did you take it in turns, or did you all play together?
- JG No they all played together for if they were goin  
tae have a dance, like.
- HM And... but you couldn't play all night...
- JG ... oh no, well - they would relieve each other,  
ye know, maybe. Some... somebody would come  
up wi a melodion again - wi an old...
- HM ... and take over on the melodion..?
- JG ... an, well there was no - there was nothing in the barn -  
there was no piano in the barn. And another thing -  
they had always got pipers...

HM Did they?

JG Oh, aye, at weddins - they aye had pipers at it - aye.

JG Oh, if ye had good dancers ye had nothing tae watch.

I mean, if ye had good dancers... a lot o bad dancers on the floor would put ye... put ye wrong... put ye off... put ye off playin. If ye had bad - ye know - them that couldna keep time at all. If you was standin lookin at them you would go wrong too. But if ye had a lot o... say a good... hall o good dancers... and easy tae play tae em... ye know ye're keepin good time an that - but...

HM Would it matter if you went wrong in the tune?

JG No - not a grain for the... for the c... not for the hall - not for them that was dancin.

They - they wouldna know if... what ye were doin.

They were hearin the sound goin up, that's all.

Well - they would aye hear the piano, whether the fiddle stopped or no they would hear the piano thumpin anyway.

That's all they had in that days - they'd no... I never saw..

I'll tell ye another thing they had... the old melodion  
- ye know, the old squeeze-box.

HM Oh, aye. Did you play a fiddle with that too?

JG Oh, aye. Hit was quite good... wi the fiddle.

Wisna so loud as the accordion.

There's a lot o... ye know, basses, an that's what's makin the dronin... sound...

ye can't go against the accordion wi a fiddle - wi the... wi the... the fearful noise it makes.

Ye never hear a fiddle wi an accordion... I'd rather play the piano - wi the fiddle...

Aye - oh aye, well they wouldna care a bit as long as ye kept good time

and gave them  
... gave them music!

### The Competitions

- HM Did you like the fest... the competitions?
- JG Oh, yes - I liked them fine. I was delighted tae go tae them... in my younger days... an jist... ye know jist... in a hurry tae get away.
- HM But you were - you were still nervous when you had to play?
- JG Oh, aye - I was...
- HM But if you were so nervous why did you... why did you enjoy it so much? You didn't actually like getting up on the platform, did you?
- JG No, I didn't like it, no...
- HM But what was... what was the great attraction - I mean, why was it that you... you liked going if you were so frightened?
- JG Well, the attraction was... was tae see if you would... win the cup or get a prize. That's what ye were goin for. Tae see if you could be... make yerself a bit better or something like that. Well as far as I ever played it, they were always good judges. They were fiddle men - fiddle men... men that could play themselves... but... eh, sometimes at the Mod... they werena very good there... the like o... takin Ian Whyte... from Glasgow... he was the leader o what?  
... the Scottish Orchestra ...

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<sup>112</sup>Ian Whyte, composer and conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra, 1935-1960.

well takin him tae judge...

Strathspeys an reels - he couldna  
play them for anything, that man.

Now that's... that would be...

that's a bad... that was a  
bad judge, that time.

He would give it... he would give the prize  
tae one that couldna play at all.

There was a lot o lads goin on there an...

tae play... an they would get... they  
woulda been jist as well in their bed!

They... they didn't know what they were doin, eh...

I don't... unless you are a good player...

unless you thought that you were a... a good...

a sort of a good player that the judge... the judges  
would say, well... that man can play - or something  
like that... eh... I wouldn't like to...

go before anyone unless I was... kinna  
half-good player, like...

### The Strathspey and Reel Society

JG ... and the lads that had no ear...

they were pullin their bow - I don't know whether  
they were playin or... (laughs) no! Ye know,  
they were pullin it acro... in a big... in a big band...

HM You would never know...

JG Ye would n... he would know. (the conductor)

HM Do you think they were just pretending, some of them?

JG Eh... some o them was. Because I was... I was  
listenin at them masel.

But if you were interested in... in the thing -  
an... a lot o them wisna - ye know - they didn't  
care an old song whether they played or no - they  
were there for the... jist that they were in the  
Strathspey and Reel Society, supposed tae be.  
But... if you were... makin yer mind up that ye

were goin tae... ye know, have a good... make a good job o it an that - you listened at the man an ye played the tune.

HM Was there ever a time when you had to play a new tune that you didn't know?

JG Well there's no many o a... (laughs) the way ye learned it - Davidson the conductor himself ... played it over before any o them - before the band ever... played it, ye know.

He played it a good few times, but of course a lot o lads read it off the book.

HM Yes, they would, aye.

JG But... I was followin himself, ye know... I was followin his own fiddlin, the way he was playin it.

HM You'd pick it up that way?

JG Jist picked it that way - that's the only way I got it. It was...

I never read... I never read it.

#### Making a Tune

JG I was diddlin away tae maself... thinkin o't ... an then I take up the fiddle an I said ach I'll make a strathspey...(laughs)... I'll let ye hear it ... will ye want it?

HM Aye.

#### The Braes o Tulloch (Fig. 24)

JG Oh, it jist came oot... out o my head, like - jist made it...

ye know - jist the way ye would start to make a tune. Diddlin away tae it...

HM Did you make it with the fiddle or were you diddling it?

JG Oh, diddlin... diddlin first... diddled away an then I jist took up... took up the fiddle



Fig. 24

Tape No: SA1974/251

Title: The Braes o Tulloch

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Type: Strathspey

Coll: Trans:

MM = c144

an jist... go at it... an then the...  
the great thing in the tunes is tae time them  
... ye know... an ye wouldn't be a good player  
if ye haven't got good time.

HM Did you get the whole thing in your head  
before you touched the fiddle?

JG The whole thing was in ma head - oh, it  
was jist... makin a terrible... noi... (laughs)  
an I had it in ma bed an all...

HM ... before you even touched the fiddle?

JG Before I'd touched the fiddle... I used tae  
have it in ma bed... singin it tae masel, an...

HM Once you started playing it on the fiddle, did it...

JG ... oh, it jist came to me, like.

HM Did you change it after that?

JG No - I didn't change it - that's the way...

HM ... you didn't change...

JG No! That's the way... the way I made it...  
but I couldn't tell ye how I made it  
... it was jist in yer head.

## Part II

## STYLE

HM ... but do you think that... the fiddlers in Speyside have a... a style of their own, or is it the same kind of style as they would have in Aberdeenshire?

JG Oh, no. I think they would have a style o their own here. Every... every... parish or county or whatever ye call it - they're all... they've all their own way o playin - ye know what I...

HM Do you think it's different from...

JG Oh, I think it'll be different, I bet ye... it might sound the same on the... when they're playin the fiddles, it might jist sound the same, but they'll have different style o playin.

Take Shetland then. Eh... Shetland...

HM Aye, Shetland has a different style.

JG Well now - the Shetland's nearer tae the way we play. The Shetland players play like the... the Speyside... players here.

HM And what is it that makes them sound like that?

JG I don't know - it's jist the way that they... that they've learned ... got into.

HM But what is it that they're doing that's making them sound, when they're playing the fiddle - what is it that's making them sound like the way you play?

JG I think it's all in the bowing. It's the way they bow the fiddle, the way they play wi their bows.

I think so... the style that...  
 well it's nearer tae the Speyside  
 ... I've heard them... I've heard them  
 on the records, like...  
 I've heard the 'Forty Fiddlers' playin there  
 ... an I said tae her - Miss Macdonald, there  
 - well they play terrible like the way we play  
 hereabout... an she said oh, aye, they do.  
 They've got the same style.  
 Now, the like o Hector McAndrew an that l...  
 them over from Banchory an Aberdeenshire  
 ... they... they play more like Skinner's style.  
 HM Do they?  
 JG Oh, aye.  
 Of course Skinner was born over there...

### 'Chording'

JG There's double strings... (plays beginning of The Sherwood Rangers)

fig. 25



HM Now... you've got a chord there...  
 JG Uhuh... now that's... it's me that put in the chord...  
 HM You put the chord in?  
 JG Aye, it sounds better...  
 if no you would jist play on the one... note.  
 I'm bad for puttin in that thing...  
 HM You like putting chords in, don't you!  
 JG (laughs)... Aye...  
 HM Did you say you used three strings at one point?  
 You didn't really did you?  
 JG No... I'm no supposed tae do it, but

- I believe I was hitten the three  
at the same time... (laughs)...
- I think it's that bow that's slippin... (laughs)...
- HM But do you often do that - hitting other  
notes by...
- JG I play it like that... aye, by... it's no,  
it's no a mistake at all.  
It's me doin that, that's playin it that way.
- HM Show me where you were doing that...
- JG Well, that's...
- (repeats beginning of Sherwood Rangers)
- ... that's chordin it, ye see... I'm bad for that  
... I don't think it would be...
- HM Oh, no it's allright that, but... you just do  
that because you like the sound, do you?
- JG Aye, that's it, I like the sound o't...
- HM Have you heard other people doing it?
- JG No. No, no. That's my style.
- HM You never heard your father doing it?
- JG Oh no - he never...  
I would get a slap if I did that... if...
- HM Oh? But I think you must have  
heard somebody doing it sometime!
- JG No, it's jist the way I've learned maself.  
Jist the way I've learned it.  
I never heard anybody at it... I think I  
... I don't know if I'm right  
- I think I might be all wrong...

#### Rhythmic Concepts and Stylistic Comparisons

- JG There's Hector McAndrew... well, he's jist  
a... he plays the tune but he hasna got  
the style that Skinner has got.  
No. He hasna got the kick in it.
- HM And, what's the kick - what do you mean?
- JG A kick in it, well...

a strathspey that you can dance to...

Skinner never played a strathspey  
like a solo - like a Slow Air.

He played it that you could do the  
Highland Fling to it.

HM He didn't play... slow strathspeys, he played them faster?

JG Oh, he might play... a slow strathspey's different  
to one that... one for dancin time.

You'd get... you can play... you'll get slow  
strathspeys right enough.

HM But are they not for dancing to?

JG Oh, no. No, no, they would be for  
like a Slow Air played...

JG ... that's what I should have said

- he (Skinner) plays his tunes wi a good lilt.

A lilt, ye know - an the other ones is too dead,

I would say, ye know.

Well, Hector McAndrew doesna play  
for dancin time.

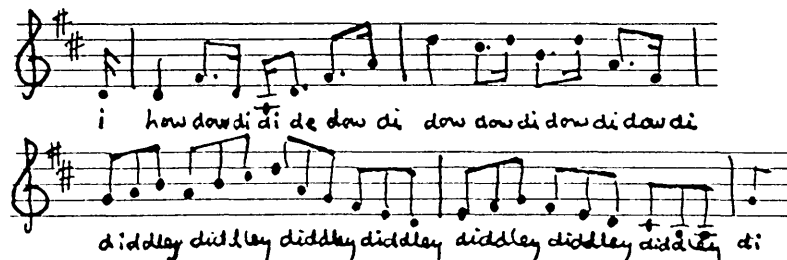
No like Skinner...

no - this is what I mean

- there's The Laird o Drumblair now...

well Skinner says... (diddles beginning of The Laird o  
Drumblair)

fig. 26



... that... and he used to play The Laird o Drumblair  
... and ye - ye're supposed to... single that notes  
out - ye know... when you're playin.

- HM Single it - what do you mean?
- JG Well, when ye... in the runs, eh, ye know the  
runnin o the tune.  
Well the first measure ye go... (diddles again,  
separating the triplet groups with added emphasis)  
... like that... (diddles second half of the first 'turning'  
in the same way)  
... that's what made he's playing good -  
that's what made a good playing wi him.
- HM And do... do other people not do that?
- JG Oh, well, I don't... many o them - I've  
never heard many o them doin it - singlin...
- HM Well how would they do that bit if they -  
if they weren't doing it - what would it sound like?
- JG They might be slurrin it... jist wi their fingers  
- but no bowin it.
- HM Not bowing it separately - the fast notes?
- JG No.
- HM (diddles)... separate bows for each one of these little notes?
- JG Aye - that's what makes a bonny sound in the...  
in your tune... eh, on certain tunes...  
certain - the like o The Laird o Drumblair  
an The Devil in the Kitchen an  
tunes like that.

Craigellachie Bridge (Ex. 4)

- HM ... would you be able to dance to that when  
you were... when you were pulling it back  
like that - would it be..?
- JG Oh, aye, ye could dance to it, right enough  
- but, eh, you would need, if you were goin  
to dance... a Highland Schottische  
or something like that...  
you would need to play it a wee bit faster  
- you know what I mean.

A wee bit faster... I've jist...  
 you can't play that heavy tunes - you know  
 they're very heavy...  
 you can't play that tunes fast.

HM Show me how you play that first note  
 in the Craigellachie Bridge...  
 how you hold it back

JG Oh... (plays first few bars with pause on first beat)

HM ... but it's a longer bow on the first note?

JG It's a longer bow on the first one - aye, well  
 that's what makes your tune... takes it  
 out better - I think anyway.

#### Playing 'Double Strings'

HM Which notes of the tune?  
 Is it the first note of the tune has to be  
 'double strings'?

JG Aye, well he (Hector McAndrew) does it on that.

HM And do you do it mostly on the long notes?

JG Ye do it on the long notes  
 if ye can jist get yer fingers in... in time.  
 Ye've tae watch yer timin o yer tune.

HM Now what's the reason for doing that?

JG Well the reason for that...  
 you're playin single... single notes  
 - it makes the tone o the tune louder.  
 It makes yer fiddle sound louder, ye see

HM Yes, of course.

JG You play double string... double...  
 it makes... see... there - I'm  
 playin two E's here, look... (plays two E's together, one  
 open, the other stopped on the A string)  
 ... and when you... other ways now...  
 ye only play one E (plays open E)  
 ... ye get the double... the two soundin ye see,  
 an it... it makes yer tune louder



and sweeter and better too, ye know.

There's two A's now (demonstrates)

... see... an there's... G

HM Is that something that your father did?

JG No, he never did that -

I did that myself.

HM You did that, and how did you  
pick that up?

JG It was me that learned that - jist  
listenin at other lads playin on there (radio)  
... even in 'Scotch Corner' (radio programme)  
an that... last year.

I never started till about...  
about last year it was, an I thought  
I would try it maself, but...

HM Aye, you never tried it before?

JG No, no. I thought it would make the...  
the tune... it makes it better.

### Ornaments

HM You know when you put your...  
when you're putting your birles or grace-notes  
in your tunes, on the fiddle, how do you...  
how do you do that - do you  
know how you do that?

JG Wi yer finger.

HM Uhuh. Do you always do it the same way  
or do you have different ways of doing it?

JG Aye, it's the same way done, but...  
ye come tae a tune an... an... it's  
nice, they're bonny in a tune too, ye know  
- but... (ye're better than the pipes)

HM Now whereabouts in the tune do you put them in?

JG Well, it jist depends what way -  
what measures you  
... where you would like to put them in.

HM And have some tunes got more than others?  
 JG Oh, aye...  
 HM And what kind of tunes?  
 JG Marches would be them that have more grace-notes.  
 HM They would have more, would they?  
 JG Oh, aye - ye canna put them  
 ... they wouldna be very good  
 puttin in tae strathspeys.  
 No, they're too ill for that.  
 HM And what about reels?  
 JG Ye can do them for marches...  
 no for reels either - no.  
 But ye could do them good wi marches  
 - because it's a different timin, ye see.  
 Ye're faster wi yer strathspey an then  
 ye're faster wi yer reel.

### Bowing

HM What's the... the secret of bowing a strathspey  
 ... what's the..?  
 JG The secret of it?  
 HM What's the most difficult thing to do  
 when you're bowing a strathspey?  
 JG Well... (laughs)... ye'll have tae sae what  
 old Skinner said...  
 ye must have plenty o kick in it  
 an plenty o the Devil in it - old Skinner  
 used tae say  
 if ye can't pull yer bow - ye can't  
 play a strathspey!  
 Ye'll have tae pull it from end to end.  
 JG ... lot o them slur the tunes,  
 ye know take it out wi their fingers.  
 They don't use their bow.  
 HM Let's see what you mean by that.

- JG (he plays a long bow, 'taking out' notes with the fingers)  
 ... trailin it... pullin yer bow  
 across and takin it out... (plays beginning of Maggie  
Cameron, see Ex. 5)  
 ... that way... slurrin...  
 I bow it... (plays the same but with more detached bowing)  
 ... see?  
 I pull the bow - now a lot o them take it  
 out wi their fingers... (plays the same with continuous  
 legato bowing)  
 ... that way - trailin it.
- HM And show us your way again.
- JG My way is... (plays again with his own bowing style)  
 ... the way I do it - that's the way Skinner  
 used to do.  
Lift yer... ye're supposed tae  
 lift yer bow in strathspeys...  
 lift it up... off yer...  
 tae make a better - get a better tone.

### Conclusion

- JG ... oh... there's no young players now...  
 well, there might be young players, but, I mean  
 ... they'll no come...  
 they'll no come up tae the old lads  
 - the old style o men  
 ... the like o that old McQueen man  
 - ye know, him I was talkin, speakin aboot...  
 and... well... who...  
 where'll ye get a better player  
 than old Skinner?

## Appendix 1a

LIST OF REPERTOIRE RECORDED

BY JOHN GRANT

This list includes all complete items recorded from John Grant. It represents, on the whole, that part of his repertoire which he plays most often, though it also includes items which were especially requested for the purposes of this study.

The sources given are intended for reference only, and do not necessarily conform with Mr. Grant's own variants. Abbreviations given in brackets after each title indicate its form thus:

M - March

J - Jig

S - Strathspey

W - Waltz

R - Reel

P - Polka

SA - Slow Air

The titles of source collections are abbreviated as follows:

Allan - Allan's Reels, Strathspeys and General Dance Music

Gow - A Collection of Strathspey Reels, (1801)

HC - The Harp and Claymore (Skinner)

Marshall - Collection of Strathspey Reels (1781)

Kerr 1-4 - Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies, vols. 1-4

Ross 1-5 - Pipe-Major Ross's Collections of Highland Bag-  
pipe music, vols. 1-5

SV - The Scottish Violinist (Skinner)

Full details of these may be found in the bibliography. In the main, the collections quoted are those most used by fiddlers.

Where repeat recordings were made of particular items, the number quoted is that of the recording used for transcription. In a few cases, published settings are not readily available, or, in the case of pipe tunes, have only a restricted printed distribution. These tunes, whose dissemination is due far more to oral tradition than to print are not given a source in the list.

<u>Tune</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Tape No.</u>
The Argyllshire Gathering(M)	Pipe march	SA 1973/149
Auchdon House (M)	-	SA 1973/147
The Barren Rocks of Aden(M)	HC	SA 1973/147
The Bob o Fettercairn(R)	K1	SA 1974/248
Bob Steele(S)	SV	SA 1973/147
The Braes o Tulloch(S)	John Grant	SA 1974/251
The Brig o Perth(S)	K1	SA 1973/147
Calain mo ruin sa(W)	Gaelic Song	SA 1974/249
Cameron's Got His Wife Again(S)	K1	SA 1974/246
Clean Pease Strae(R)	K1	SA 1974/246
Craigellachie Bridge(S)	Marshall	SA 1974/246
The Deil Among the Tailors(R)	K1	SA 1973/144
The Devil in the Kitchen(R)	SV	SA 1973/144
Gille Calum(S)	K1	SA 1974/246
The High Road to Linton(R)	K1	SA 1973/144
Jenny Dang the Weaver(R)	K1	SA 1973/144
The Jig o Slurs(J)	Pipe Jig	SA 1974/249
Lady Wemyss(J)	K3	SA 1943/249
The Laird o Drumblair(S)	SV	SA 1973/144
The Lass o Aitnoch(S)	unpub.	SA 1974/248
The Left Handed Fiddler(R)	SV	SA 1973/144
Loch Leven Castle(R)	K1	SA 1974/251
Maggie Cameron(S)	HC	SA 1974/248
The Mason's Apron(R)	K1	SA 1974/248
Miss L'fall(S)	K1	SA 1973/144
Mrs. MacDonald of Dunach(t)(M)	Ross 1	SA 1974/249
Mrs. Mcleod of Raasay(R)	K1	SA 1973/144
The Music of Spey(SA)	SV	SA 1974/249
Niel Gow's Farewell to Whiskey(S)	Gow	SA 1973/144
Pet o the Piper(J)	K1	SA 1974/249
The Queen's Welcome to Invercauld(M)	HC	SA 1974/246
The Reel o Tulloch(R)	K1	SA 1974/149
The Sherwood Rangers(P)	-	SA 1974/249
The Smith's a Gallant Fireman(S)	K1	SA 1973/144
The Soldier's Joy(R)	K1	SA 1973/144

<u>Tune</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Tape No.</u>
The Sprig o Ivy(M)	Ross 5	SA 1974/249
Stirling Castle(S)	K1	SA 1973/144
The Stirlingshire Militia(M)	Ross 1	SA 1973/144
Whistle oer the Lave O't (S) (Shean Trews)	K1	SA 1973/147

## Appendix 2

## TRANSCRIPTIONS

The transcriptions included here are numbered the same as the sound recordings on Track B of the Example Tape and are referred to in the main text of the dissertation by the prefix Ex. No. No.6 is not transcribed here (see fig.23).

Most of the transcriptions present only that part of a performance relevant to analysis in the text. The 'harmonic' transcriptions (those required for analysis in Chapters 3 and 4) are arranged on two staves, so that those notes played on open strings are written on the bottom stave while fingered notes are on the top. I have found this method more useful than any other as a means of illustrating the extent to which open strings are used in this style, and as a more accurate form of notation.

The following is a complete list of examples recorded on Track B of the tape:

<u>Example No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Informant</u>	<u>Tape No.</u>
1	The Laird o Drumblair	John Grant	SA 1973/144
2	The Smith's a Gallant Fireman	"	SA 1973/144
3	The Brig o Perth	"	SA 1973/147
4	Craigellachie Bridge	"	SA 1974/246
5	Maggie Cameron	"	SA 1974/248
6	The Reel o Tulloch	"	SA 1973/149
7	The Argyllshire Gathering	"	SA 1973/149
8	The Jig o Slurs/Lady Wemyss	"	SA 1974/249
9	Mrs. Macdonald of Dunach	"	SA 1974/249



<u>Example No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Informant</u>	<u>Tape No.</u>
10	Calain mo ruin sa	John Grant	SA 1974/249
11	The Balmoral Highlanders/ Laird o Drumblair	Alec Grant	SA 1973/141
12	The Devil in the Kitchen	John Ferguson	SA 1973/141
13	Maggie Cameron/ Devil in the Kitchen	Jimmy Ross	SA 1973/141
14	The Smith's a Gallant Fire- man	John Ferguson	SA 1973/145
15	The Reel o Tulloch	Charles Milne	SA 1957/17
16	The Reel o Tulloch	Hector McAndrew	SA 1960/75
17	Craigellachie Bridge	"	SA 1959/7
18	The Laird o Drumblair	Scott Skinner	-
19	The Laird o Drumblair	Bill Hardie	SA 1959/8
20	The Brig o Perth	Charles McIntyre	SA 1967/51
21	The Smith's a Gallant Fire- man	Charlie Bremner	SA 1956/50

All examples recorded at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches per second.

## EXAMPLE 1

Tape No: SA1975/142

Title: The Laird o Drumblair

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

MM  $\downarrow$  = 160

Type: Strathspey

Coll:

Trans:

$\downarrow$  =  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{4}$  tone flat.

EXAMPLE 2

Tape No: SA1973/144

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MMJ = c184

Handwritten musical notation for the first system of 'The Smith's a Gallant Fireman'. The notation is written on two staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of notes and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' and '3~'. The bottom staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and contains a series of notes and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' and '3~'. The word 'open strings' is written below the bottom staff.

Handwritten musical notation for the second system of 'The Smith's a Gallant Fireman'. The notation is written on two staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and contains a series of notes and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' and '3~'. The bottom staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and contains a series of notes and rests, with some notes marked with 'x' and '3~'.

EXAMPLE 2 (cont.)

Tape No:

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

Type:

Area:

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

Musical score for Example 2 (cont.). The score is written on two staves. The first staff is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It contains a melody with various note values and rests. The second staff is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time, featuring a bass line with notes and rests. The score concludes with a final measure on the second staff.

Musical score for Example 2 (cont.). The score is written on two staves. The first staff is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It contains a melody with various note values and rests. The second staff is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time, featuring a bass line with notes and rests. The score concludes with a final measure on the second staff.

EXAMPLE 3

Tape No: SA1973/147

Title: The Brig o Perth

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll: Trans:

MM  $\text{♩} = c160$

open strings

continued over

EXAMPLE 3 (cont.)

Tape No:

Title: The Brig o Perth

Type:

Area:

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

Handwritten musical notation for the first system of 'The Brig o Perth'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, featuring a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The bottom staff is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as clefs, sharps, and note heads.

Handwritten musical notation for the second system of 'The Brig o Perth'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, featuring a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The bottom staff is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as clefs, sharps, and note heads.

Handwritten musical notation for the third system of 'The Brig o Perth'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, featuring a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The bottom staff is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as clefs, sharps, and note heads.

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth system of 'The Brig o Perth'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, featuring a melody with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The bottom staff is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a final half note. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as clefs, sharps, and note heads.

EXAMPLE 4

Tape No: SA1974/246

Title: Craigellachie Bridge

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM ♩ = c132

EXAMPLE 5

Tape No: SA1974/248

Title: Maggie Cameron

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM  $\downarrow = c160$

Continued over



## EXAMPLE 5 (cont.)

Tape No:

Title: Maggie Cameron

Type:

Area:

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

Musical score for Example 5 (cont.). The score is written on two staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The music consists of a series of chords and single notes, with some notes beamed together. There are several measures of rests and some notes with accidentals (sharps and flats).

Two empty musical staves, one treble clef and one bass clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4.

Musical score for Example 5 (cont.). The score is written on two staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The second staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The music consists of a series of chords and single notes, with some notes beamed together. There are several measures of rests and some notes with accidentals (sharps and flats). The score ends with a double bar line and the word "etc." written above the staff.

Two empty musical staves, one treble clef and one bass clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4.

EXAMPLE 6

Tape No: SA1973/149

Title: The Reel o Tulloch

Type: Reel

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM ♩ = c116

Handwritten musical notation for 'The Reel o Tulloch'. The score is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The notation consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing beamed sixteenth notes. The second staff continues the melody, also featuring beamed sixteenth notes. The notation is handwritten and appears to be a transcription of a recording.

open strings

Continued over

Handwritten musical notation for 'The Reel o Tulloch', continuing from the previous page. The notation is written on two staves, showing the continuation of the melody. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The notation consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing beamed sixteenth notes. The second staff continues the melody, also featuring beamed sixteenth notes. The notation is handwritten and appears to be a transcription of a recording.

etc.

EXAMPLE 6 (cont.)

Tape No:

Title: The Reel o Tulloch

Type:

Area:

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

continued from bar 9

etc.

This block contains musical notation for Example 6 (cont.). It features two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of eighth notes and rests, with a measure marked 'continued from bar 9'. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of eighth notes and rests, with a measure marked 'etc.'.

This block contains four empty musical staves, likely for additional notation or a continuation of the piece.

from bar 13

etc.

This block contains musical notation for Example 6 (cont.). It features two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of eighth notes and rests, with a measure marked 'from bar 13'. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a series of eighth notes and rests, with a measure marked 'etc.'.

This block contains four empty musical staves, likely for additional notation or a continuation of the piece.

EXAMPLE 8

Tape No: SA1974249

Title: The Jig o Slurs and Lady Wemyss

Type: Jigs

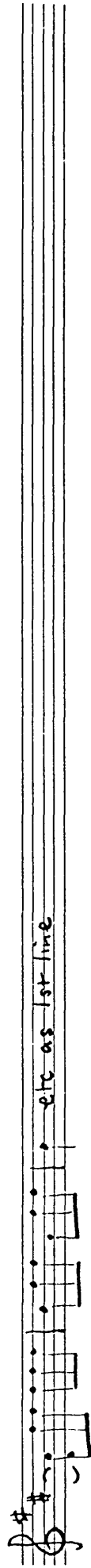
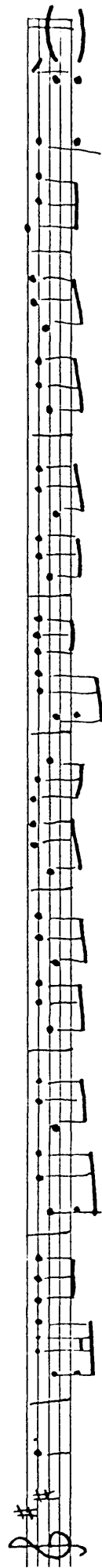
Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

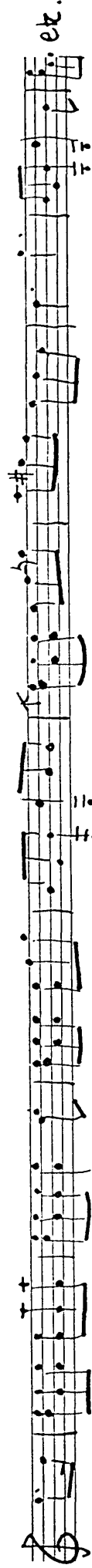
MM ♩. = c138



218



Lady Wemyss



EXAMPLE 9

Tape No: SA1974/249

Title: Mrs Macdonald of Dunach(t)

Type: Pipe March

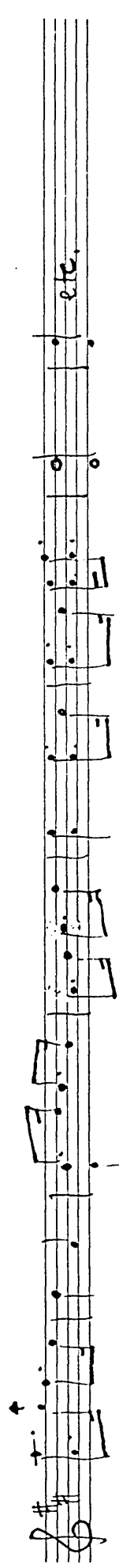
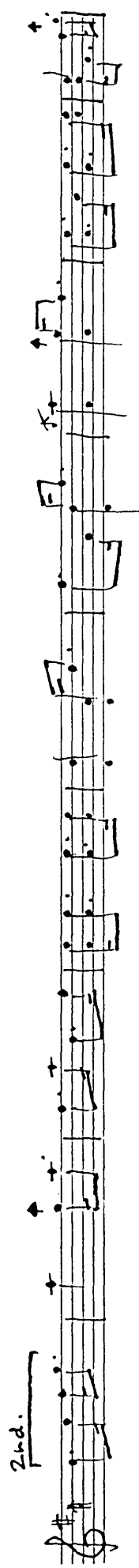
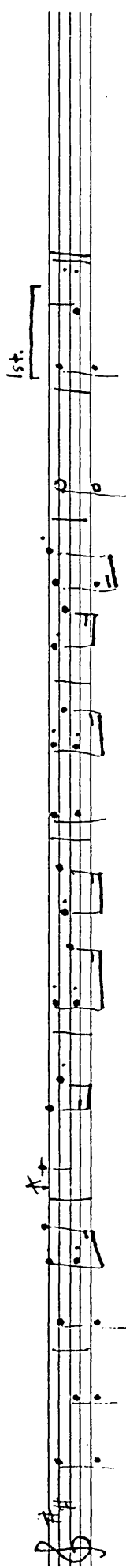
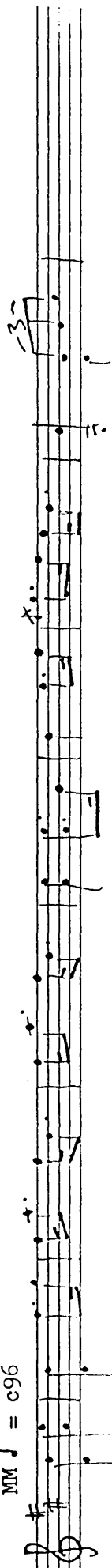
Area: Tullloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM  $\text{♩} = \text{c96}$



↑ =  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  tone sharp.



EXAMPLE 10

Tape No: SA1974/249

Title: Calain mo ruin sa

Type: Popular Gaelic Song (Waltz)

Area: Tulloch

Performer: John Grant

Coll: Trans:

MM  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$  52

Handwritten musical notation for the song 'Calain mo ruin sa'. The notation is written on two staves. The first staff is in treble clef and the second staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The melody is written on the first staff, and the accompaniment is written on the second staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines. The word 'sic' is written below the second staff.

Four sets of empty musical staves, each consisting of five lines, arranged horizontally. These staves are provided for additional notation or recording.

EXAMPLE 11

Tape No: SA1973/141

Title: The Laird o Drumbclair

Type: Strathspey

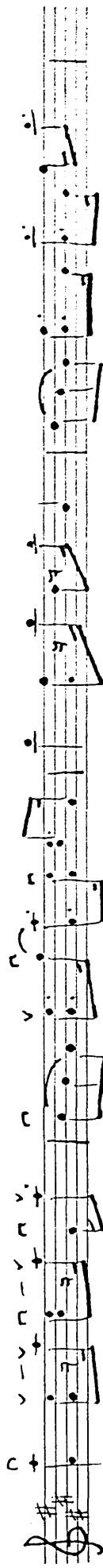
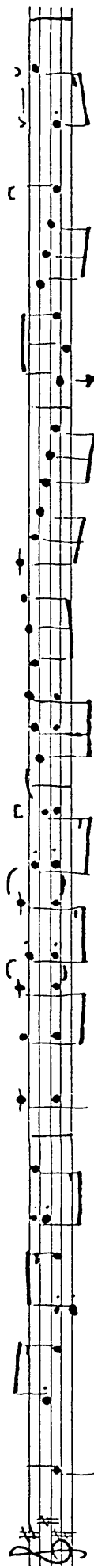
Area: Carrbridge

Performer: Alec Grant

Coll:

Trans:

MM ♩ = c160



→ = ♯ - ♯ tone flat.

EXAMPLE 12

Tape No: SA1973/141

Title: The Devil in the Kitchen

Type: Strathspey

Area: Carrbridge  
MM ♩ = c160

Performer: John Ferguson

Coll:

Trans:

Handwritten musical score for 'The Devil in the Kitchen', a Strathspey. The score is written on four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'MM ♩ = c160'. The notation includes various rhythmic values (eighths, sixteens, and dotted rhythms), rests, and dynamic markings such as 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano). There are also performance instructions like 'simile' and 'tr' (trill). The second staff continues the melody. The third staff shows a change in the key signature to two sharps (F# and C#). The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final cadence. The notation is dense and characteristic of traditional Scottish dance music.

Four empty musical staves, each consisting of five horizontal lines, provided for additional notation or a second part of the piece.



EXAMPLE 13

Tape No: SA1973/141

Title: Maggie Cameron

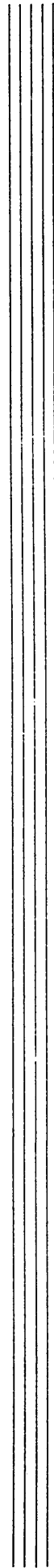
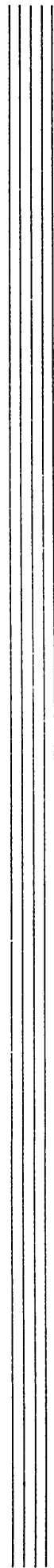
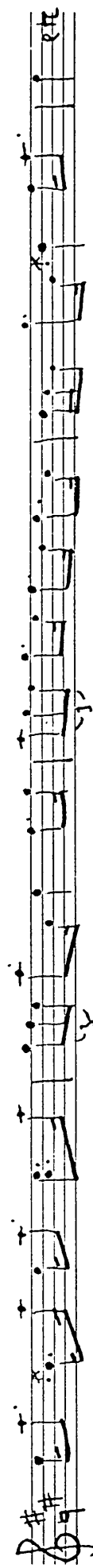
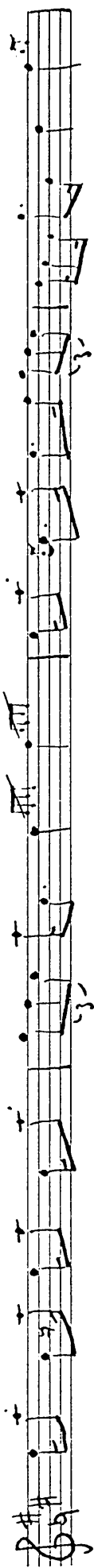
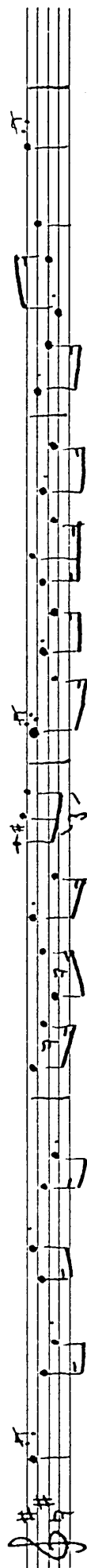
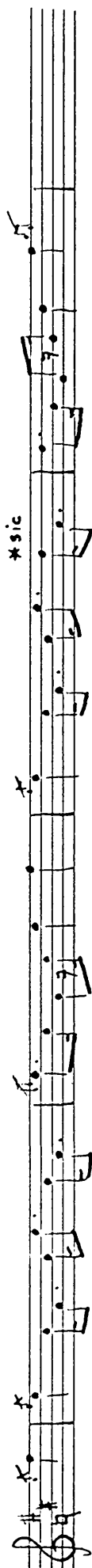
Type: Strathspey

Area: Carrbridge

Performer: Jimmy Ross

Coll: Trans:

MEI 1 = c168



EXAMPLE 14

Tape No: SA1973/145

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

Type: Strathspey

Area: Tomintoul

Performer: John Lindsay

Coll:

Trans:

NM ♩ = c138

Musical score for Example 14, Strathspey 'The Smith's a Gallant Fireman'. The score is written on two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked NM ♩ = c138. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. A bracket labeled 'open strings' is placed under the first staff. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

Continuation of the musical score for Example 14. The score is written on two staves, continuing from the previous page. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

EXAMPLE 14 (cont.)

Tape No:

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

Type:

Area:

Performer: John Lindsay

Coll:

Trans:

Handwritten musical notation for the first system of Example 14. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings, with some notes enclosed in brackets.

Handwritten musical notation for the second system of Example 14. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings, with some notes enclosed in brackets.

EXAMPLE 15

Tape No: SA 1957/17

Title: The Reel o Tulloch

Type: Reel

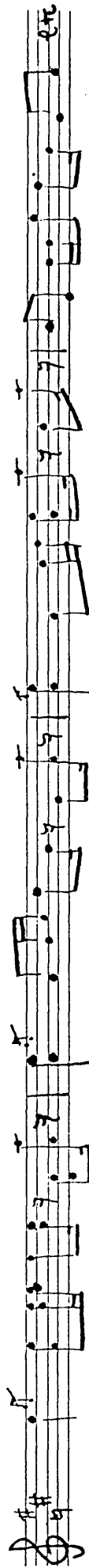
Area: Dufftown

Performer: Charles Milne

Coll: F. Collinson Trans: H.M.

MM ♩ = c180

2nd time



## EXAMPLE 16

Tape No: SA1960/75

Title: The Reel o Tulloch

Type: Reel

Area: Cults, Aberdeen

Performer: Hector McAndrew

Coll: F. Collinson Trans: H.M.

MM J = c126

The musical notation is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing beamed sixteenth notes. There are several accidentals, including naturals and sharps. A first ending bracket is marked with a 'K' and a first ending sign. A second ending bracket is marked with a 'K' and a second ending sign. The second staff continues the melody, also featuring beamed sixteenth notes and accidentals. The notation ends with a double bar line and the word 'etc.' written below the staff.

A single empty musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C).

A single empty musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C).

A single empty musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C).

A single empty musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C).

EXAMPLE 17

Tape No: SA1959/7

Title: Craigellachie Bridge

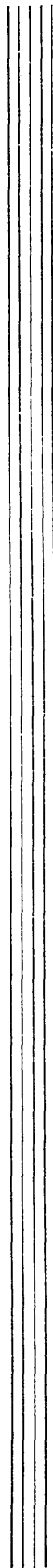
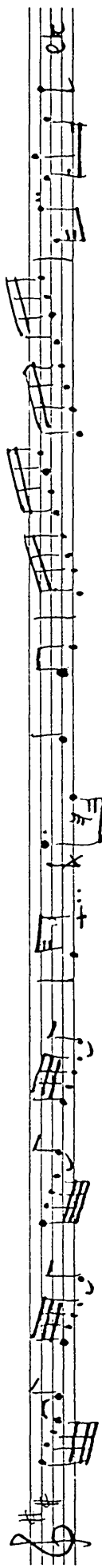
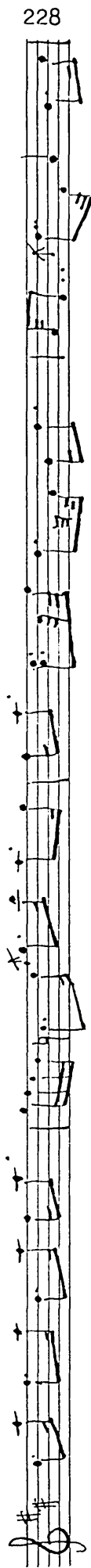
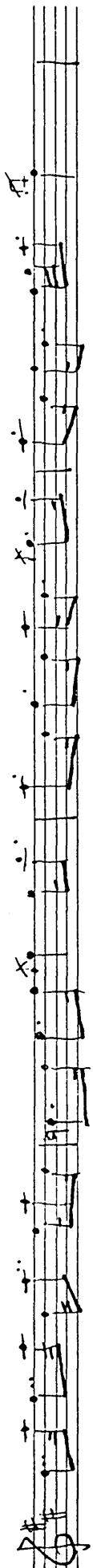
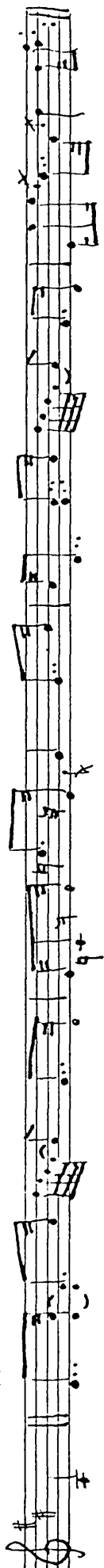
Type: Strathspey

Area: Cults, Aberdeen

Performer: Hector McAndrew

Coll: F.Collinson Trans: H.M.

MM ♩ = c144



EXAMPLE 19

Tape No: SA1959/8

Title: The Laird o Drumbclair

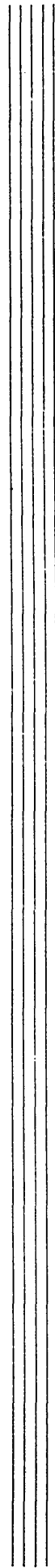
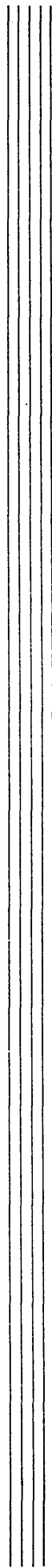
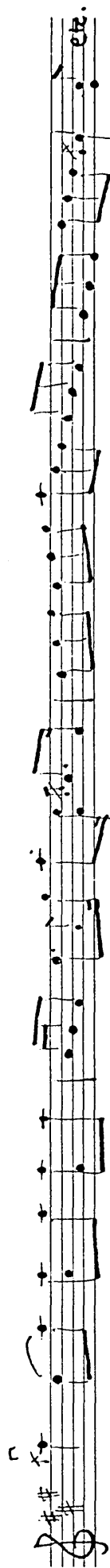
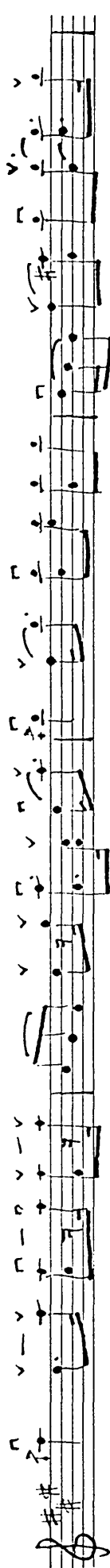
Type: Strathspey

Area: Aberdeen

Performer: Bill Hardie

Coll: F. Collinson Trans: H.M.

MM ♩ = c176



EXAMPLE 20

Tape No: SA1967/51

Area: Bunessan, Mull.

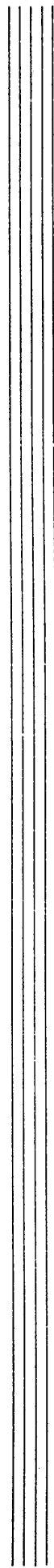
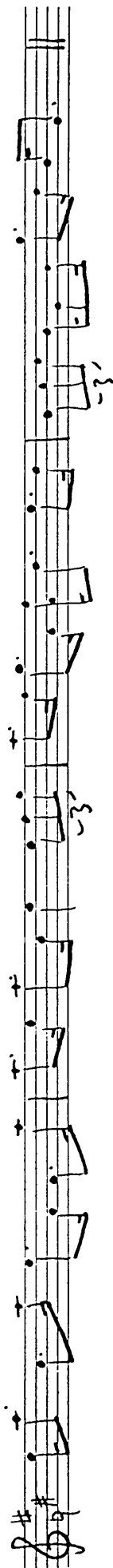
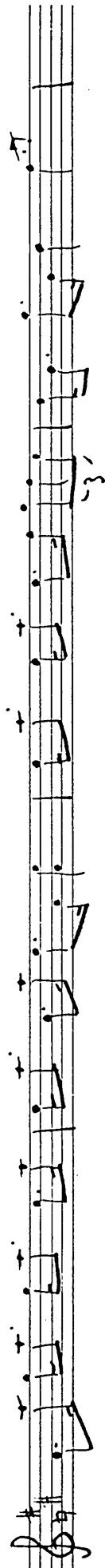
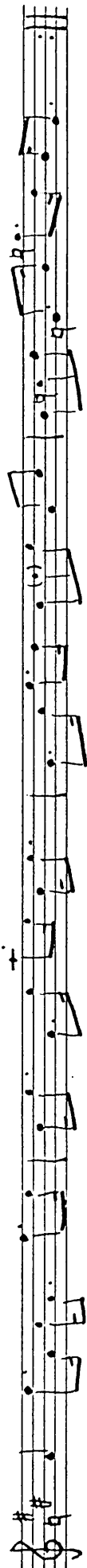
Title: The Brig o Perth

Performer: Charles McIntyre

Type: Strathspey

Coll: A. Bruford Trans: H.M.

Mt ♯ = c160





EXAMPLE 21

Tape No: SA1956/50

Title: The Smith's a Gallant Fireman

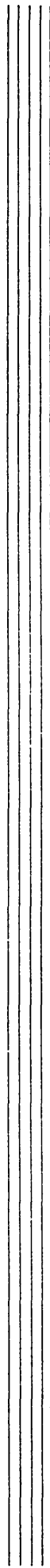
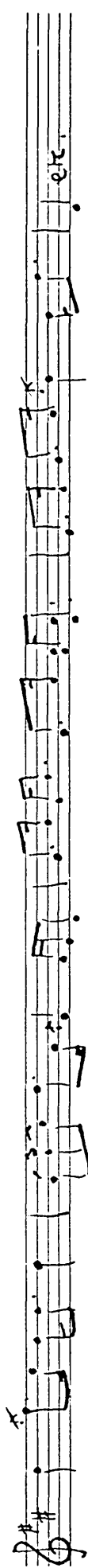
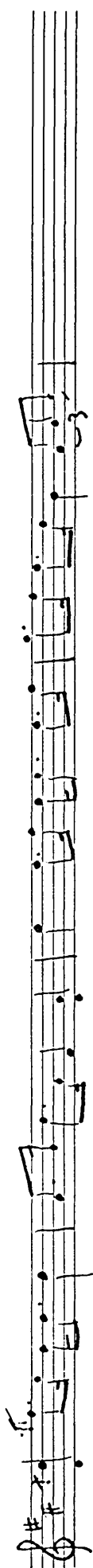
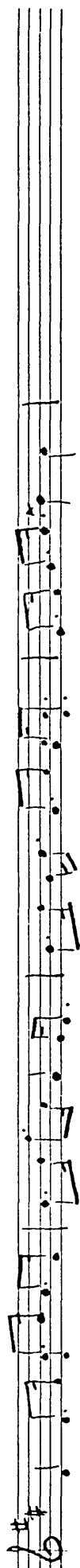
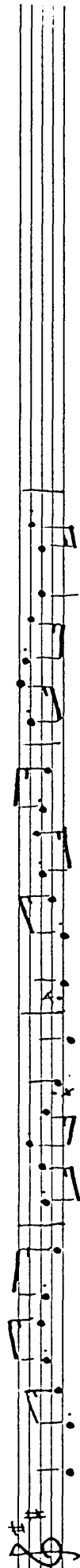
Type: Strathspey

Area: Cienlivot

Performer: Charlie Bremner

Coll H. Henderson Trans: H.M.

MM ♩ = c160



## Appendix 3

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON INFORMANTS

The following brief notes concern only principal informants living in Strathspey - those who contributed substantial musical or other information towards this dissertation. Others whose reminiscences about musical life in the area, though valuable, were less specific, are omitted - as are those musicians from other parts of the country whose recorded performances I have used for comparison.

Charlie Bremner aged c. 50, works as a mashman at the Glenlivet Distillery. He makes his own fiddles, and has himself had some violin tuition. Has played in local dance bands and bothy bands and has recently become more involved in the 'folk-revival' with appearances at the Kinross Traditional Music Festival and on disc. Plays relatively few strathspeys, preferring jigs, horn-pipes, polkas, etc. His recording of The Smith's a Gallant Fireman used in the present study was made by Hamish Henderson for the School of Scottish Studies; for various reasons I was unable to record him personally.

Rose Cumming, Boat of Garten. Pianist and official accompanist to the Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society between the wars, Miss Cumming was able to give much valuable information about the Society's activities and about prominent local fiddlers of that time.

John Ferguson, Carrbridge. Aged 81; ran a taxi business in the area until his retiral. Unschooled, but has limited musical literacy. His father played the concertina and an uncle played the pipes. Was a member of the Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society and a regular entrant in local competitions where he won several prizes. Remembers playing fiddle at local dances and weddings in the 1920's when payment could be as much as ten shillings for a night. Plays only occasionally now, for his own amusement.

Willie Fraser, Aberlour. Postman, in his late forties. Has played various instruments, including fiddle, but after losing some fingers in an accident, now plays only the mouth-organ. Is a well known performer at festivals such as that at Kinross (where he has won prizes in both mouth-organ playing and didd-ling) and he has also played on radio and on disc. Teaches Scottish Country Dancing at a nearby village and has a keen interest in traditional music history, especially in local song traditions.

Alec Grant, Carrbridge. Aged 88. Known as Alec Grant Ess, after the small farm which he owned before retiring. Former member of Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society and frequent prize-winner at local competitions. He played regularly for dancing in his younger days, but age and poor health have made it difficult for him to play more than occasionally in recent years. His playing is still remarkably strong despite his deafness, however. His father was a fiddler of some local repute, and he himself knew

James Scott Skinner.

John Grant, Tulloch. Aged 68. Comes from a long line of Tulloch fiddlers and still lives in the croft in which his family have been tenants since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Was a member of Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society and a well-known fiddler at village dances before the 2nd World War. Was a prize-winner at local competitions, and occasionally travelled further afield to others. Is now retired and lives alone in his cottage. Still enjoys playing his fiddle, but has only rarely been asked to play for dancing (at a Nethy Bridge hotel) in the last few years. Known locally as Jocky Cullachie after the name of his croft.

John Lindsay, Tomintoul. Aged c. 50. Farmer of a hill-farm (Croughly) outside Tomintoul village. Unschooled; his father was a fiddler. Played for dances in his youth, but only plays for his own pleasure at home now.

Peter Macdonald, Grantown on Spey. Aged c. 67. Retired electrician. A semi-schooled player who was for a short time a pupil of John Lawson, a local dancing-master and associate of Skinner. Was a member of Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society; his wife was a dancing pupil of Lawson.

Charles Milne, Dufftown. Was aged 82 when recorded for the School of Scottish Studies by Francis Collinson in 1957. He was a noted fiddle-maker and a fiddler with some training as a violinist.

James McKenzie, Carrbridge. Aged 69. Retired post-office worker. His uncle was a local fiddler and composer of fiddle-tunes. He himself had a few violin lessons in his youth and learned to read music a little. Was a member of Grantown Strathspey and Reel Society, but has not played his fiddle much in recent years.

Jimmy Ross, Carrbridge. Aged c. 46. Born in Carrbridge but lived for several years in Glasgow. He had violin lessons, but is interested only in traditional music. As proprietor of a hotel in Carrbridge he meets many of the musicians from professional dance-bands and folk-groups who come to the area to perform at the Aviemore Ski-Centre. Is an avid collector of records of fiddle music, especially those of modern groups, like The Chieftains, where fiddle music is made prominent. Prefers to play pipe-marches rather than strathspeys, which he tends to play in march-style.

Fred Reid, Dufftown. Aged 68. Learned to play the fiddle from his father. Was a farm worker and his father a grieve. His family were 'all musical' and came originally from Dandalieth, but moved down the valley to Dufftown in his teens. Played a great deal for dances between the wars, with his brother (another fiddler) and later in a dance band. Was taken as a child to hear Scott Skinner play in the village hall at Knockando. He has not played much since his wife's death (about two years before the field-work). Used to play the melodion.

Willie Reid, Dufftown. Aged 63. Younger brother of the above. Is a cooper at one of the Dufftown distilleries. He had violin lessons from a teacher in Elgin, but is actually a much better performer on mouth-organ and jews harp; he is also an expert diddler. Used also to play trumpet in the dance band run by his two brothers.

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